

**SUPERPOWERS
IN BLOODY
CONFLICT**

BRAVE PILOTS FLEW DYING SOLDIERS TO SAFETY

Bringing History to Life

**War hero
sacked!**

MacArthur's blunders
cost him his job

EAST VS WEST:

**Cold War
meltdown**

World's top nations
battled over Korea

THE KOREAN WAR

BATTLES • WEAPONS • TACTICS

**INVADED
BY US**

Lightning attack
turned the war

**CHINA
HIT BACK**

Guerrilla tactics
destroyed UN lines

**KOREA WAS
CUT IN TWO**

Peace agreement
was never signed

SEOUL CHANGED HANDS FOUR TIMES • JET FIGHTER'S DEBUT



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US infantry soldiers in a firefight with M1 Garand rifles during the Korean War.



Cold War heats up in Korea

World War II War hero Douglas MacArthur is stumbling close to another brilliant victory: his US-led UN troops have pushed North Korean forces to the northern edge of the Korean Peninsula. But in October 1950, China suddenly sends 300,000 fresh soldiers into the conflict. The Americans are forced on the defensive before the front is frozen at the 38th parallel – the same place the war began a year earlier.

In Korea, the Cold War heats up for the first time. After World War II, the fronts between East and West

“In Korea, both East and West trial new weapons.”

have been drawn clearly. The iron curtain separates the western world from the communist east. Korea is also divided into two. And when war breaks out in the divided country, the South immediately receives support from the United States, while the Soviet Union and China back the communist North Korea. The war gives the superpowers the opportunity to trial new weapons developed after World War II. Advanced tanks roll out in the hilly terrain, and Korea's airspace becomes the scene for the first jet-powered dogfights.

In this special edition you can read about the ferocious battles, the new weapons and the political aftermath of a conflict that continues to this day.

Happy reading!

US Marines retreat and watch how their own planes use napalm to bomb their former camp on the Chosin Reservoir. They did this to prevent the enemy from getting hold of their equipment. December 1950.





WAR'S PROGRESS

After World War II, North and South Korea were on a collision course until the great powers of the United States and the Soviet Union intervened. A hard and exhausting conflict followed.

- 6 North and South are torn apart**
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1945–50

North and South are torn apart

After World War II and the occupation of Japan, Korea was a divided society. The gap between different parts of the country deepened after the superpowers of the United States and the Soviet Union gave their support to opposing sides in a conflict that exploded into war, changing the country's fundamental makeup.

Text: **ARTUR SZULC**



YOU ARE NOW CROSSING
38TH PARALLEL
US C.O.B 728MP



The conflict between North and South Korea unfolded around the 38th parallel.

“The decision was made to divide the Korean Peninsula along the 38th parallel”

THE LIFE PICTURES NATIONAL ARCHIVES / THE LIFE PICTURE COLLECTION / GETTY

KOREA IS TORN APART



AP/WIDE WORLD

Winston Churchill, Harry Truman and Joseph Stalin during the Potsdam Conference in July 1945 where the decision was made to divide the Korean Peninsula along the 38th parallel. The idea was to help the country to attain democracy.



Korea was divided by the 38th parallel.

The root cause of the armed conflict on the Korean Peninsula was created first and foremost by political and military developments in the area following the Japanese surrender in August 1945. Western and US forces, as well as China, had already decided at the Cairo conference in 1943 that Korea, which had been annexed to Japan since 1910, would become an independent nation. This was also a condition that Stalin agreed to when declaring that the Soviet Union would take part in the war against Japan during the Yalta Conference in February 1945. The victorious countries finally confirmed their agreed decision during negotiations in Potsdam a few months later.

In addition to the decisions on relocation and delineation in Europe, it was also agreed to divide the Korean Peninsula into northern and southern parts along the 38th parallel, which had been a Japanese military administrative boundary. This measure came from an American initiative, as it was feared that the Red Army, which had established

itself in North Korea before the invasion of Japan, could potentially exploit the situation and take control of the entire peninsula. US troops took over their zone in September 1945. It was then agreed that the goal during the Soviet and American administrations should be to begin to build democratic institutions, unite the country and prepare for independence.

Democracy and reunification should take place within the framework of the Joint Commission, which was established by the Soviet Union and the United States in 1945. It should work together with a Korean Council. The plan was for a united Korea to achieve independence after a five-year period, but Koreans were unhappy with the schedule because they did not want to wait so long. However, the process had barely started before the cracks in such an arrangement began to appear.

The Korean community was divided, not just politically, but also economically and morally. The biggest conflicts were between the rich and the poor, between communists and anti-communists,

“Soviet propaganda... began to laud the Red Army as those who had liberated Korea”

as well as those who had collaborated with the Japanese occupying forces and those who had resisted them.

Korean representatives struggled to reconcile the contradictions and so failed to agree on a way forward. In addition to this, cracks in cooperation between the two superpowers emerged that also affected the peninsula. Disagreements applied primarily to these two questions: which organisations should be involved in democratisation efforts and how would the united nation's interim government be chosen?

Despite the Allied agreement and occupying forces' declarations, both sides pursued policies in its own zone that failed to create conditions conducive to the unification process. Therefore, what was intended as a provisional solution for the purpose of creating a united and sovereign Korean nation, eventually just served to deepen and solidify the division.

When the Soviet army established its administration north of the 38th parallel, its propaganda machine immediately began to laud the Red Army as those who had liberated Koreans from the Japanese and capitalist oppressors. A conscious effort was made to ensure the people didn't exercise direct political power, but instead picked Korean communists to lead the interim committees, which had been established in 1945 with the aim of preparing for independence.

Kim Il-Sung, who had been a prominent communist guerrilla fighter and officer in the Red Army, gained an overall position of power when he became the leader of the so-called Provisional People's Committee. With this body in place, the communists started to steer society in the Soviet occupation zone in a totalitarian socialist direction.

Only communist sympathisers were considered for jobs in the new administration, political opponents were harassed or pushed aside, freedom of the press was quashed and police surveillance became more stringent. Following orders from Soviet advisors, no economic cooperation was initiated with the southern side. The repressive policy led to many thousands of Koreans fleeing southwards. But what did they escape to?

A military administration under the leadership of General John R Hodge, an experienced officer, was

created in the US occupation zone, but he lacked flair for political issues. Without any further thought, remaining Japanese and Koreans who had collaborated with the Japanese occupying power were placed in positions as advisors and officials in the new administration.

This process did nothing to increase confidence among the great masses of poor Koreans who'd hoped for greater social justice. On the contrary, their hopes were soon dashed. The Americans opposed the newly established political committees, as most of its members were left-wing sympathisers.

Instead they backed former Japanese resistance fighter Syngman Rhee and his newly formed Korean Democratic Party, a magnet for conservative and nationalist circles. The most important thing for the Americans was that Rhee and his followers (among the richest Korean landowners) were ardent anti-communists. With US support, Rhee would eventually become South Korea's political leader, and it was a position he secured with the help of repressive police tactics against left-wing activists. His rule became increasingly authoritarian, prompting frequent protests, including strikes organised by radicals. But despite this, Rhee's position was never really threatened.

In view of the political situation both in the north and south as well as the selfish behaviour of the occupying forces, the prospect of reaching unification was very small, perhaps even non-existent. Negotiations within the Joint Commission ►



Oshkosh Daily North-West's first page announces Japan's capitulation and the end of World War II.



Japanese General Umezo Yoshijiro signs the US surrender in front of, among others, General Douglas MacArthur aboard the battleship USS Missouri, 2nd September, 1945.



Soviet soldiers in Korea in 1945. When the Japanese were expelled, the Soviet Union occupied the northern part of the peninsula. Red Army personnel later helped to train North Korea's military.

► were repeated time and again, and to break the stalemate, the US took the matter to the UN General Assembly in the early autumn of 1947. Its good relationship with the General Assembly meant it had nothing to fear and could count on their willingness to impose sanctions.

The Americans proposed a plan to hold UN-monitored elections in both north and south. The resulting government should take over responsibility for Soviet and US administrations and negotiate for withdrawal of occupation troops.

The Soviet side protested believing that this was not the UN's role and that the shape of the political process in Korea had already been decided by the formation of the Joint Commission in December 1945. It also suggested the countries' forces on the peninsula should be withdrawn in the commission's final meeting in September 1947.

The US proposal was passed in a vote taken on 14th November, 1947. The UN adopted a resolution that led to the creation of a commission with the task of monitoring the election in both sectors. This election would be held in the summer of 1948. At this time, relations between the two superpowers had deteriorated and the Soviet Union marked its unwillingness over the General Assembly's decision by denying the temporary UN commission access to the North Zone. It knew that a majority of the Korean people lived in the south, and most of them were not amenable to the communist movement.

In the south, the election, which was boycotted by communists and other left-wing sympathisers,

“Unlike the United States, the Soviet Union had equipped its partners with heavy military equipment such as tanks, artillery and aircraft.”

resulted in the formation of a government by Syngman Rhee, and on 15th August, 1948, the Republic of Korea was formally established. In the north, communist Kim Il-Sung became head of state and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea was created on 9th September. The formation of the state was only recognised by other countries in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. Instead of a united Korea, the two states had become rivals with both laying claim to the entire peninsula.

Again, the United States used the UN General Assembly as a tool in its Korean policy. The members of the assembly passed a resolution in which Rhee's government was considered the legitimate government on the peninsula, while the government in the north did not get endorsement.

In 1949, there was not much to indicate that unification would be possible, although both parties pretended that this could still happen peacefully. A new UN Commission arrived in South Korea in early 1949, but the commission's work was limited, partly because the North Korean government in Pyongyang refused to recognise it, and partly because of Rhee's anti-communist attitude. At the same time, the UN was still banned from the north by the Soviet occupying forces that had taken control of North Korea when the country was divided.

There was nothing in the relationship between North and South Korea that could reverse the situation or moderate hostility. For both Korean leaders, it was therefore important to retain support of the states that protected them, so they kept their military presence on the Korean Peninsula. Kim Il-Sung made his first official visit to Moscow in March 1949, and there would be more visits to Stalin and Mao in the immediate future. The purpose of the visits was to get both communist leaders' support for a plan to take control over all Korea by force of arms.

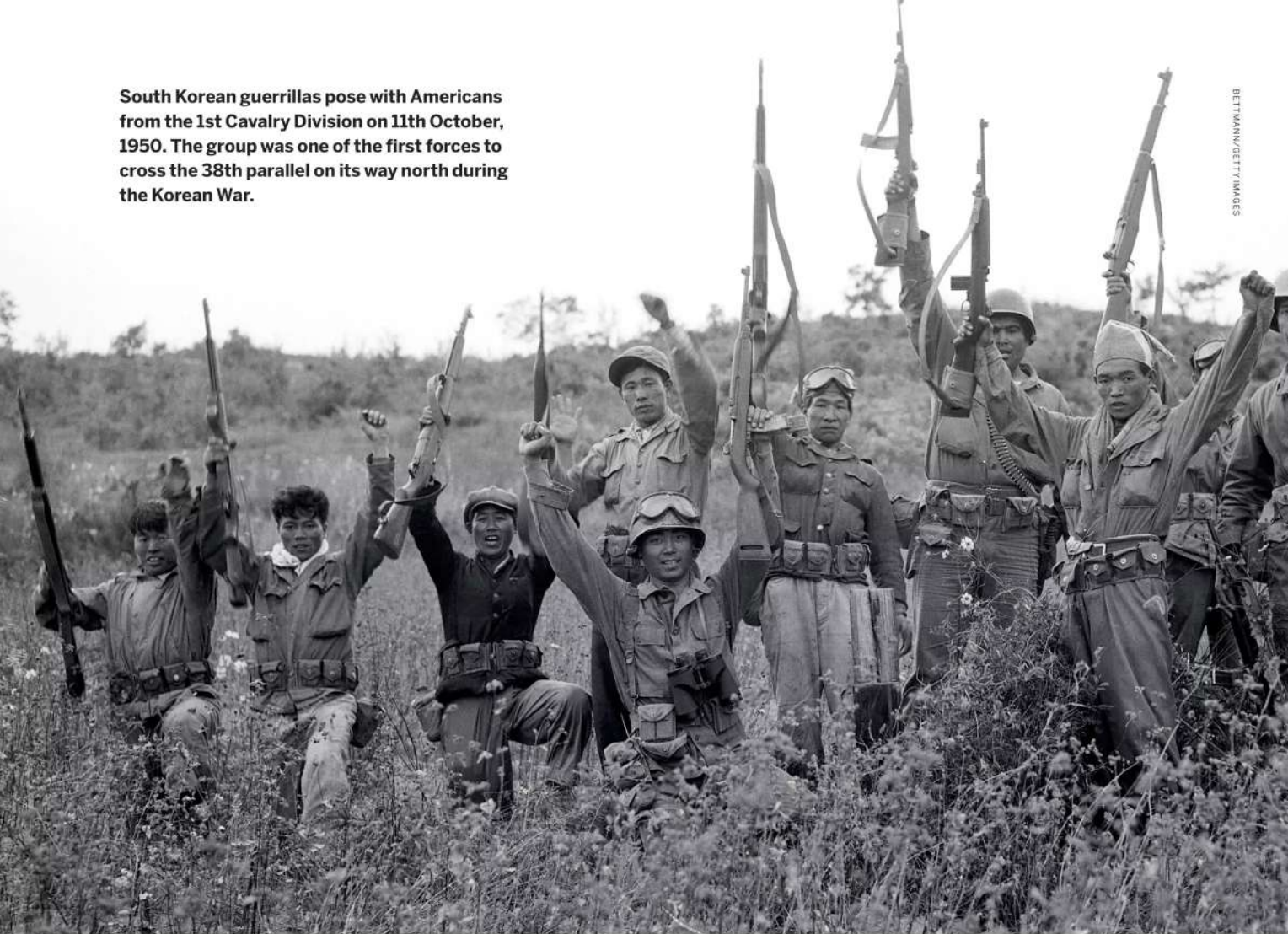
Eventually, both Stalin and Mao reluctantly gave their approval to Kim Il-Sung's plans, but it's worth emphasising that the idea of an offensive came from the North Korean dictator. Stalin was sceptical since he wanted to avoid sliding into war with the



Kim Il-Sung served in the Red Army during World War II.

South Korean guerrillas pose with Americans from the 1st Cavalry Division on 11th October, 1950. The group was one of the first forces to cross the 38th parallel on its way north during the Korean War.

BETTMANN/GETTY IMAGES



United States, but at the same time believed that the risk was low, especially since the peninsula did not seem to be calculated in Washington's overall security policy. He encouraged Kim Il-Sung to first determine what Mao understood by the plans, so he could distance himself from direct responsibility.

At the same time, Rhee tried to convince the US that it shouldn't pull back its forces as the North was significantly stronger militarily than South Korea. Rhee argued that at least the US should compensate any withdrawal by increasing support in the form of arms shipments.

Unlike the United States, the Soviet Union had equipped its partner with heavy military equipment such as tanks, artillery and aircraft. In Washington, decision makers were not interested in allowing the US to be involved in a war in a peripheral region without direct relevance to US security policy, and perhaps they also feared that Rhee would make a military attack on the North. So, despite Rhee's pleas, the Americans pulled their military forces from South Korea in the summer of 1949 without leaving any heavy

equipment. Washington had its eye on Europe, and of course Stalin had noticed this.

A security measure was adopted by the United States through the UN General Assembly. The UN Commission would monitor the 38th parallel and report any violations. According to Brigadier General William Roberts, the head of the Military Advisory Group left in Korea, both sides were responsible for the conflict, but he noted that it was the South that had behaved more aggressively, provoking a North Korean reaction.

Thus, tensions gradually rose on the peninsula, and in the North preparations were made to subdue the South with military force. Unlike the Americans, who attempted to restrain Rhee, Mao and Stalin eventually gave Kim Il-Sung the green light to attack. The troops received even more Soviet materiel, and on 25th June, 1950, North Korean forces invaded. The armed conflict that followed would take millions of lives. 🇺🇸

Artur Szulc is a military historian. The article is a précised translation from his forthcoming book on the Korean War.



Syngman Rhee tried to convince the US not to withdraw its forces, or at least assist with arms shipments.

On the 25th June, 1950 North Korea started a war. By August, the Korean Peninsula had almost entirely been occupied.

Mao defends the communist revolution

CHINA JOINS KOREAN WAR

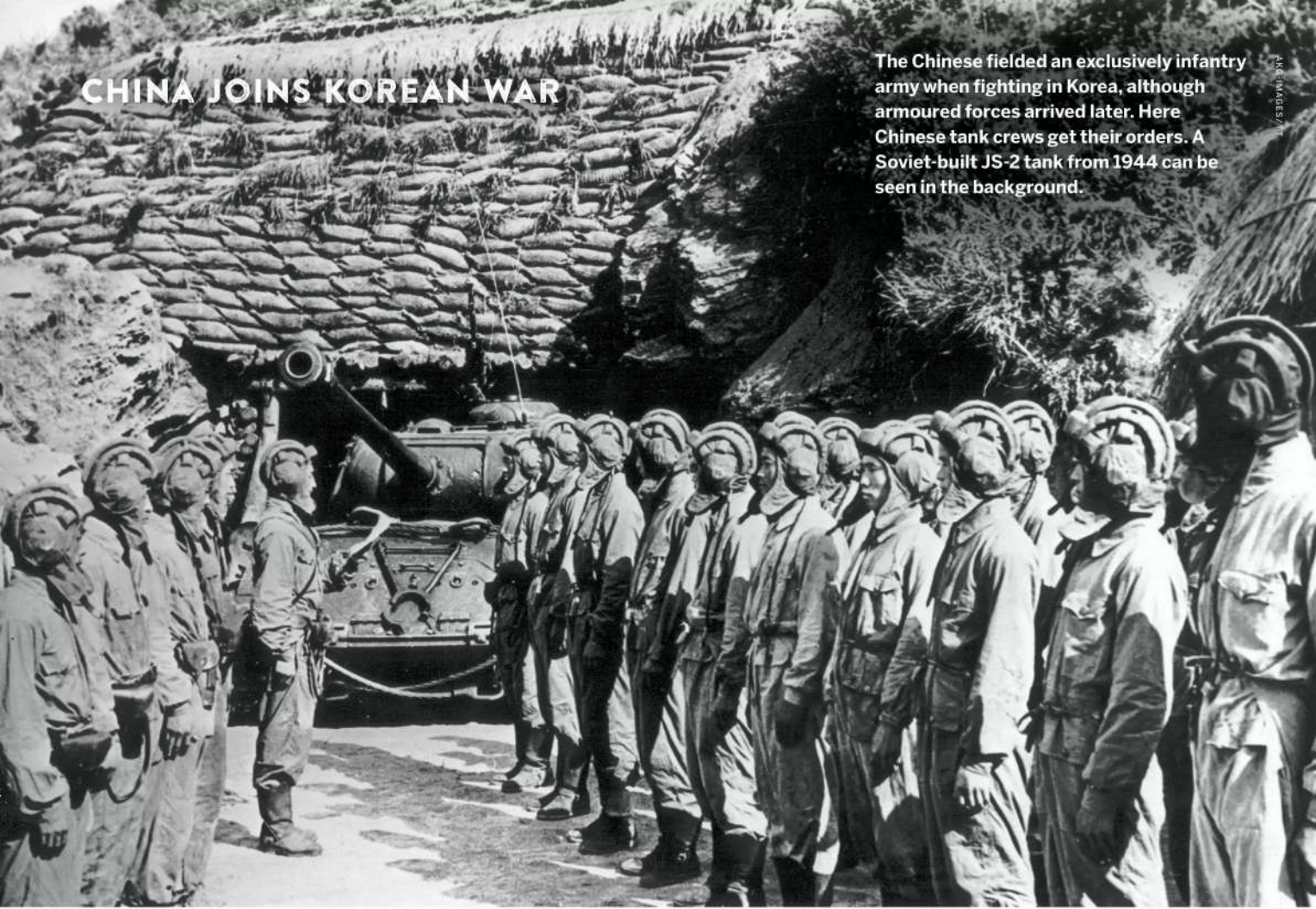


North Korea was saved when Chinese forces crossed the border in 1950, but the risk of nuclear war increased. Lars Ericson Wolke explains why China joined the Korean War – and how US intelligence services got it so wrong.

Text: **LARS ERICSON WOLKE**

CHINA JOINS KOREAN WAR

The Chinese fielded an exclusively infantry army when fighting in Korea, although armoured forces arrived later. Here Chinese tank crews get their orders. A Soviet-built JS-2 tank from 1944 can be seen in the background.



The troops retreated southwards. Although UN soldiers suffered huge losses, US bombers caused even greater losses to the Chinese but that did not stop them. Seoul once again fell into communist hands before it was later recaptured by the UN coalition.

By the summer of 1951 the front had stabilised at the 38th parallel and in July ceasefire negotiations

were started. Yet it was only two years later – in 1953 – that a ceasefire was finally agreed. By then, UN troops had lost 94,000 soldiers – 55,000 of them American. Combined Korean casualties on both sides totalled more than three million soldiers and civilians, while the total North Korean and Chinese losses were an incredible 1.5 million soldiers. The 38th parallel was cemented as the border between North and South Korea, and is still monitored by international observers today.

China had – since the late 1920s – found itself in almost constant civil war between the ruling Chinese KMT (Kuomintang – or Chinese National Party) and the CPC (Communist Party of China). The latter's Red Army was led by Mao Zedong, whose established reputation as a military genius is still significantly exaggerated today. It was probably the future prime minister Zhou Enlai and generals like Liu Bocheng, who received Soviet military training, who were responsible for the growth of the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA).

FOR A LONG time, the troops under nationalist leader Chiang Kai-shek were superior, and the communists were forced to fight a guerrilla war, although they were close to final defeat in the



The Chinese offensive surprised UN forces. Chinese artillery equipped with Soviet 76-mm Howitzer model from 1927.

“THIS APPEARED A DEADLY THREAT TO MAO’S GOVERNMENT, WHICH HAD ONLY ESTABLISHED ITSELF ONE YEAR EARLIER”

mid-1930s. But Japanese invasions – first in Manchuria in 1931 and then the rest of China in 1937 – threatened the entire country, and prompted both nationalists and communists to work together at times against the invader. But civil war continued alongside the fight against Japan, and the empire soon occupied large parts of the Chinese coastline, including major cities like Peking (now Beijing), Guangdong, Nanjing and Shanghai.

When Japan surrendered in September 1945, the civil war resumed in earnest. The KMT’s National Revolutionary Army (NRA) was as large as its communist opponents and was equipped with significant amounts of US materiel. But while some NRA forces kept high standards, others were significantly worse-off, with poor discipline and low morale. Mao’s army had quantities of materiel captured from the Japanese; they also received supplies from the Soviets. PLA forces also had rigid discipline, which made them appear stronger than their opponent in the eyes of the civilian population.

In October 1948, communist forces went on the offensive and the fighting culminated in a major operation at Huai-Hai, north-west of Shanghai. There raged the greatest military battles since the end of World War II; between November 1948 and January 1949 over one million soldiers – 550,000 communists and 528,000 nationalists – faced each other. It was far removed from the guerrilla war that Mao is often associated with; on the contrary, a very conventional war was fought.

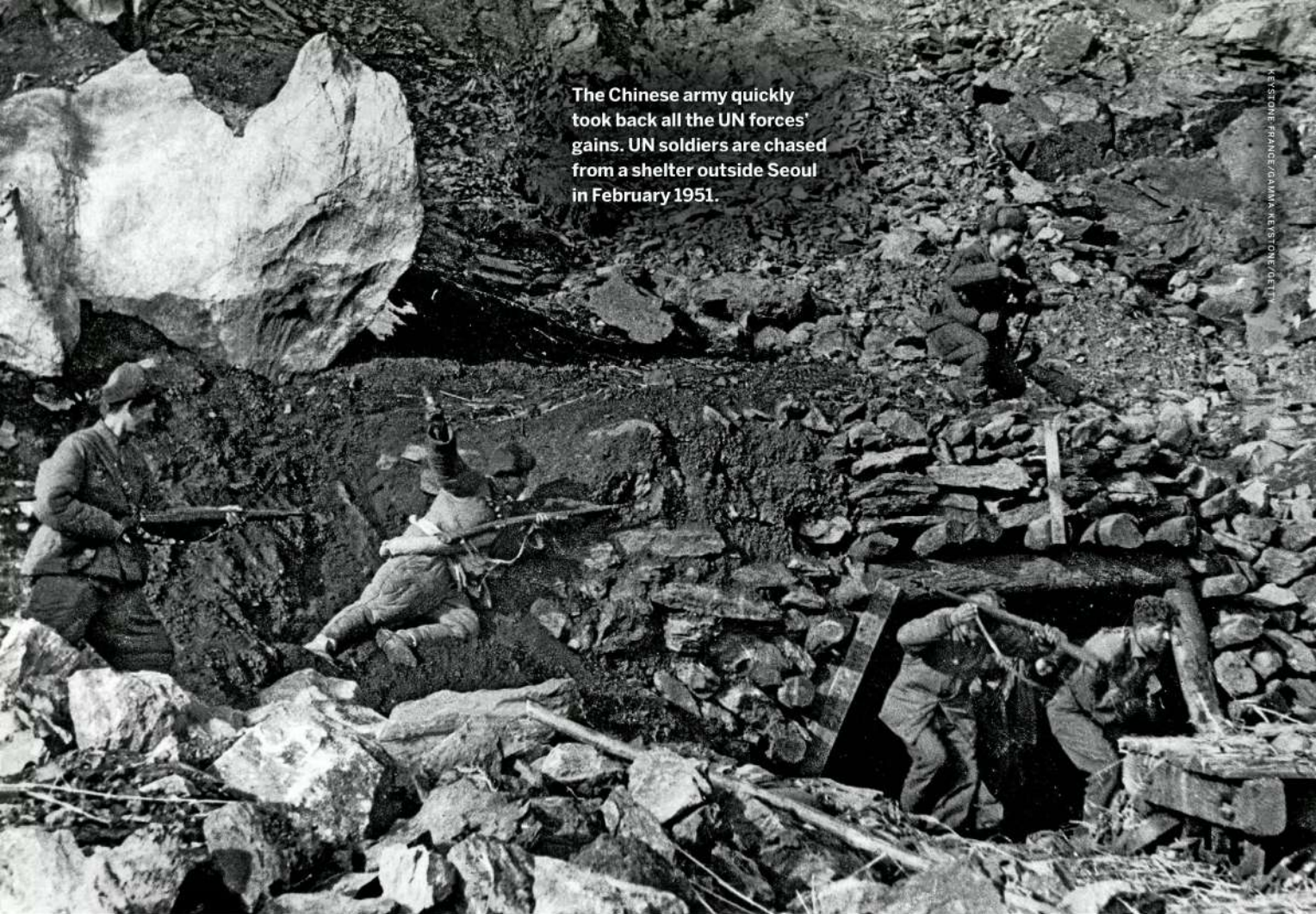
WHEN THE FIGHTING around Huai-Hai was over, the civil war was decided. The KMT had lost 400,000 men, or a quarter of its army. Now Kai-shek and his nationalists fled to Taiwan as their bastions on the mainland fell one by one. On 1st October, 1949, Mao proclaimed the People’s Republic of China from the rostrum at Tiananmen Square in Beijing.

Only the US fleet in the Formosa Strait prevented the PLA from successfully invading Taiwan, which bought it enough time to build up its defences. Instead, communist forces occupied the independent Tibet in the autumn of 1950.

At that time, victorious UN troops were moving north through North Korea and Beijing saw how



The previously successful UN forces abandon their equipment and retreat from the Chinese on foot in the harsh winter weather.



The Chinese army quickly took back all the UN forces' gains. UN soldiers are chased from a shelter outside Seoul in February 1951.

KEystone FRAnce/GAMMA KEystone/GETTY

- troops allied with the KMT and Taiwan were approaching the Chinese border. This communist Chinese perspective on the Korean War is important for understanding what happened later.

NORTH KOREA'S MILITARY difficulties were causing major turmoil in both Beijing and Moscow. In particular, the Chinese leadership was increasingly concerned about how UN troops had moved northward beyond the 38th parallel. It was not only that Korea might be reunited under US leadership, but that an anti-communist coalition was approaching the Chinese border. This appeared a deadly threat to Mao's government, which had only established itself one year earlier. Therefore, at the start of August, border forces in Manchuria received orders to prepare to intervene in Korea.

On 1st October, 1950, on the first anniversary of the establishment of the People's Republic, Premier Zhou Enlai made a speech in which he claimed that China would not "supinely tolerate seeing their neighbours being savagely invaded by imperialists".

For those who understood Chinese political language, the signals were clear: Kim Il-Sung's regime in North Korea would not be allowed to fall to the UN coalition. At the same time, Zhou and Nie Rongzhen, then acting chief of the army's general staff, sent a warning via the Indian ambassador Panikkar in Beijing that they would not sit back with their hands folded and let the US come up to the Chinese border through North Korea; they also emphasised that not even the threat of a US atom bomb would put the Chinese off. On the contrary, according to Rongzhen, a few million Chinese deaths were a cheap price to pay to preserve the country's independence.

"MACARTHUR DEMANDED THAT CHINESE BASES IN MANCHURIA BE BOMBED AND THE COUNTRY TARGETED WITH NUCLEAR WEAPONS"

THE CHINESE WARNINGS reached Washington via an official statement from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but the United States did not take the Chinese seriously. They didn't believe that China would dare intervene on its own without active support from Soviet air and naval forces.

Norwegians took care of the wounded

★ When talking about military healthcare in Korea, most people associate it with the helicopter-equipped mobile US field hospitals MASH. Insight into these can be found in the movie *M*A*S*H* and the TV series of the same name.

The medical situation is actually more complicated, and includes the nursing efforts from 10-15 countries, including Denmark and Norway.

Norway contributed as part of the UN forces from 1951. The Norwegian Mobile Army Surgical Hospital (NORMASH) was established quite close to the front.

Norway also provided direct financial contributions to the allied forces, while establishing the National Medical Centre in conjunction with Denmark and Sweden. Denmark also provided the hospital ship

Jutlandia, which had a mix of Danish and Norwegian personnel.

Officially, Sweden remained neutral and did not participate in the Korean War as a nation; instead, the Swedish Red Cross was responsible for Swedish efforts.

The Swedish Red Cross Field Hospital was completed in September 1950 in Pusan (now Busan) on the south coast of Korea. There were around 140 Swedes supported by around 30 Americans and many South Koreans. The hospital received the wounded direct from the front.

After the war, the Swedish field hospital was rebuilt as a permanent



Red Cross personnel at the Swedish Red Cross Field Hospital in the South Korean city of Pusan.

hospital in Pusan before it was closed in 1957. A Scandinavian teaching hospital in Seoul was established in 1958, and transferred to the South Korean state in 1968, which ended Scandinavian involvement. Yet Swedish ceasefire observers still watch that the ceasefire is upheld.

In addition, a Chinese intervention should have come a lot earlier to repel the landing in Inchon. US military leadership assumed that there were 100,000-125,000 Chinese soldiers on the border with North Korea, which was not a large enough force to be effective. In addition, General MacArthur was convinced that the US Air Force could easily stop any Chinese advance. US intelligence reports of China's willingness and ability were wrong on all levels: politically, strategically and operationally. The consequences were a near disaster for UN troops.

THE AMERICANS FAILED to acknowledge that Korea had become a traditional invasion route to China, used on three different occasions in the previous 50 years alone. In addition, North Korean dictator Kim Il-Sung relied on Chinese aid while Joseph Stalin's Soviet Union was also supportive of Chinese military action.

In Beijing, Mao chose to intervene despite opposition from the likes of Zhou Enlai and other military commanders. They warned of the US's massively superior firepower both in the air and on the ground, but Mao's attachment to guerrilla warfare saw him claim the Chinese soldiers were

more politically motivated and more experienced in close combat.

On 25th October, 1950, UN forces stood eight kilometres from the Chinese border along the Yalu River. During the week that followed, they were subjected to a powerful counterattack, as increasing numbers of Chinese soldiers slipped through their front lines. Not long after, prisoners from all four Chinese armies had been identified.

A WEEK EARLIER, on 19th October, the first Chinese forces had begun to cross the Yalu under cover of darkness and without radio. The hilly and wooded terrain helped hide their movements, but even so, this was a gigantic fiasco on the part of allied intelligence.

Chinese commander Peng Dehuai commanded forces from the 38th, 39th, 40th, and 42nd Armies. After a couple of weeks, he also added the 20th, 26th, 27th, 50th, and 66th Armies. Combined they provided 30 divisions in a force officially named the People's Volunteer Army.

The extra divisions were added at the last minute because the North Korean Army had almost been wiped out. It was only when the UN forces clashed with major Chinese forces that they finally ►

CHINA JOINS KOREAN WAR



► understood the extent of what was about to happen. General MacArthur ordered that the bridges over the Yalu should be destroyed, and on 21st November, American B-29 bombers had taken out all but one. In New York, the UN General Assembly condemned the Chinese intervention, but also stated that China's borders should be respected. On the ground, UN troops launched an offensive in the north on 24th November, but the same evening the Chinese made a counteroffensive at the Chongchon River.

ON 27TH NOVEMBER, the South Korean corps collapsed, and the US-led Eighth Army risked being surrounded. A Turkish UN brigade fought hard, but was eventually forced to surrender to the Chinese.

Subsequently, all coalition forces were forced to retreat, but it turned out that the Chinese had advanced far behind the UN lines and lay hidden along the planned retreat route. A British attack failed to clear the waiting Chinese as it was only possible to get limited air support, and only during

daylight hours. The UN forces were threatened with dissolution because they were forced to retreat on foot in bitter winter cold while their burning vehicles were abandoned where they stood. Particularly heavily exposed were the US Army's 2nd Infantry Division and 1st Marine Division. In one week, the 2nd Division lost 5,000 of its 15,000 men.

ON 5TH DECEMBER, Chinese troops occupied the North Korean capital Pyongyang, while 200,000 UN soldiers and civilians as well as 17,000 vehicles and 90,000 tonnes of supplies were evacuated off the east coast of North Korea from the port of Hungnam, as all other routes out had been cut off.

This was the US Army's worst defeat since the German Ardennes offensive in December 1944. The grim lessons from the Chinese offensive also showed that the US Marine Corps fared significantly better than the army – this could be attributed to the fact the marines were at full strength along



A US Marine seeks cover during the fighting in September 1950. The tanks are M26 Pershings.

HANK WALTER/TIME & LIFE PICTURES/GETTY

with their superior training and their commanders' superior experience.

Panic spread to Seoul, Tokyo and Washington. MacArthur demanded that Chinese bases in Manchuria be bombed and the country targeted with nuclear weapons, but President Truman vetoed it since it would mean a total war with China and the risk of drawing the Soviet Union into the conflict. Instead, the president fired MacArthur in April 1951. The general's reputation as a war hero couldn't save him as he faced his final showdown with the highest political power. Following this, UN troops managed by MacArthur's successor General Ridgway succeeded in stabilising the front along the 38th parallel.

BUT THE CHINESE were also under pressure. Their losses were huge and many US officers and soldiers testified about the harsh conditions for Chinese soldiers. Their uniforms were often too thin for the hard Korean winter: at least 1,000

"THIS WAS THE US ARMY'S WORST DEFEAT SINCE THE GERMAN ARDENNES OFFENSIVE"

Chinese soldiers froze to death, and over 30,000 suffered frostbite during the winter of 1950-51. Many of those who fell or were arrested were found wearing US uniforms under their own along with American gloves and scarves to keep from freezing.

AT THE SAME time, US firepower achieved the results that critics of the Chinese intervention had predicted. After the New Year in 1951, Peng Dehuai asked for an extra 100,000 men to be deployed.

Chinese troops soon gained a reputation for making frontal attacks with death-defying aplomb against dug-in defenders while bugles sounded the attack. Some attackers lost up to 65 percent of their ►

CHINA JOINS KOREAN WAR

soldiers in such storming offensives. This course of action was as much the result of a lack of heavy weapons as of bold tactics. The Chinese's assessment of their enemy's combat ability emphasised that US soldiers were scared to die and would seek cover as soon as they were shot at, while no one took responsibility for observing their opponents. If they cut off their escape routes, American troops were so filled with panic that they abandoned their vehicles and heavy equipment to flee on foot.

In truth, the dreaded death-defying Chinese storm attacks were the result not only of political fanaticism, but also a lack of food. The often-insufficient rations were padded out with millet and other cereals to ward off hunger. It meant the well-stocked US food supplies were so enticing that Chinese soldiers simply fought to win the battle so they could access them.

NATIONALIST SOLDIERS WHO were captured in the last years of the civil war in 1948-49 were incorporated into the PLA's own forces and often sent to Korea. Former Kuomintang soldiers represented up to 70 percent of those who appeared in the Korean theatre of war. Often US soldiers met Chinese forces that quickly surrendered to reveal

“CHINA MANAGED TO ACHIEVE ITS AIM FROM THE INTERVENTION”

themselves as former KMT soldiers who had no particular desire to fight for the communists. But despite huge losses, China managed to achieve its aim from the intervention. No American troops ended up clustered along the Korean north-eastern border with China, and the communist regime in North Korea survived too. Thanks to the Chinese intervention, the Korean War definitely finds its place among the major conflicts of the Cold War.

THE UN'S AIM of reuniting Korea receded into the distance as the front rolled back southwards, and as Paik Sun-yup, commander of an infantry division during the war, recalled: “For us in the ROK Army, December 3, 1950, lives as the day when our dream of national unification by force was dashed forever”. 🇺🇸

Lars Ericson Wolke is an author and professor of military history at the Swedish Defence Academy.

Further reading:
The Dragon Strikes – China and the Korean War: June–December 1950 (2000) by Patrick C. Roe ★ **China's Road to the Korean War: the Making of the Sino-American Confrontation** (1994) by Jian Chen.

During a final offensive, UN forces pushed the North Korean Army back to the armistice line that today constitutes the border. The artillery are US M40 155-mm Gun Motor Carriages.

BETTMAN/GETTY





Swedish general Sven Grafström was the first head of the Neutral Nations Supervisory Commission in Korea.

On the left: Swedish soldier at the border town of Panmunjom.

Swedish soldiers watched over Korea's fragile peace

★ One of Sweden's most important surveillance missions – inside Korea – did not take place within the usual UN framework. The UN had been one of the participants, so monitoring the ceasefire needed a different approach.

When the war ended in 1953, a ceasefire agreement was signed, which meant that the Korean Peninsula was divided in two by a demilitarised zone 242 kilometres long and 4 km wide. Along this there was a strong military presence on both sides, which still stands today on high alert.

Delegates from both North and South Korea would gather for regular negotiations in the border town of Panmunjom. According to the ceasefire agreement of 8th June, 1953, the situation was monitored by a Military Armistice Commission (MAC), made up of the warring parties supported by a Neutral Nations Supervisory Commission (NNSC), with officers from Sweden, Switzerland, Poland and Czechoslovakia. All four were neutral,

but the first two were considered ideologically Western during the Cold War, so were balanced by the other two, which both belonged to the Soviet Union's coalition of satellite communist states in eastern Europe.

The first head of the NNSC was Swedish diplomat Sven Grafström. He gained major experience brokering difficult international diplomatic solutions during World War II. When he learned he was to head up representatives from two neutral and two East European states during the height of the Cold War, he wrote:

I imagine that we may reach an agreement if the UN side violates the terms of the ceasefire, but I do not think that agreement will be reached if the fault lies on the communist's side.

AFTER A longer stay than expected in Japan, the observer nations finally reached Korea, and on 30th July, 1953, NNSC members convened

in Panmunjom in front of a large collection of press. Once they'd gone, Grafström stated:

The members of the NNSC then took their place around a small table decked with the flags of the four nations. The game could begin.

THE "GAME" continues still. In the early years, delegations were huge: for example, at one time the Swedish delegation consisted of a total of 160 people, which were divided into ten monitoring committees (five stationed on each side of Korea). Later, manpower was significantly reduced, but Swedish and Swiss observations are still ongoing.

Today, Korea continues to be a major area of international conflict as it was in 1953, reflected in particular by tensions around North Korea's development of nuclear weapons – including its rocket-launch programme – and the sinking of the ROKS *Cheonan*, a South Korean corvette in April 2010.

US soldiers involved in street fights during the Second Battle of Seoul. The image is from 20th September, 1950.

FIVE BATTLES

Modern South Korea's capital became the centre of five bloody battles during the war. Here we explore the stories behind them.

Text: **HUGO NORDLAND**

South Korea's capital Seoul currently ranks as fourth on the list of the world's economically strongest cities. During the Korean War, the

city experienced heavy fighting, and was virtually reduced to a pile of rubble as both sides in the conflict competed for control.

In 1910, Korea was occupied by imperialist Japan, and Seoul became its military and administrative centre. When occupation was lifted after World War II, Seoul became the natural Korean capital.

During the Korean War, control of the city changed four times, and an estimated 191,000 buildings, 55,000 houses and 1,000 factories were destroyed during the fighting. At the same time,



**“CONTROL OVER SEOUL
WAS A MATTER OF HONOUR”**

OF SEOUL

hundreds of thousands of refugees flowed in from the north in hopes of finding safety in the city. But nearly half of them were forced to live homelessly on the rubble-strewn streets.

As the city was so exposed, and because it was quickly taken over by North Koreans during the initial phase of the war, Pusan – modern-day Busan – served as South Korea’s capital during the war.

Control over Seoul was a matter of honour, however, which was something General Douglas MacArthur acknowledged during his meetings

with the South Korean leader, Syngman Rhee.

After the war, Seoul was restored as South Korea’s capital, and a huge effort was made to rebuild the city. From the 1960s, development exploded as the city expanded, skyscrapers rose from the ruins, and businesses flocked to what, despite the major destruction during the Korean War, became one of the world’s most modern metropolises. 🇰🇷

Battles for the capital

- ❶ 25th-28th June, 1950
- ❷ 22nd-25th Sept, 1950
- ❸ 31st Dec, 1950-
7th Jan, 1951
- ❹ 14th-15th March, 1951
- ❺ 22nd April-
20th May, 1951

THE BATTLES OF SEOUL

1 25th-28th June, 1950

Blew up own bridge

★ 25th June, 1950: South Korea was invaded by North Korean troops who captured Seoul.

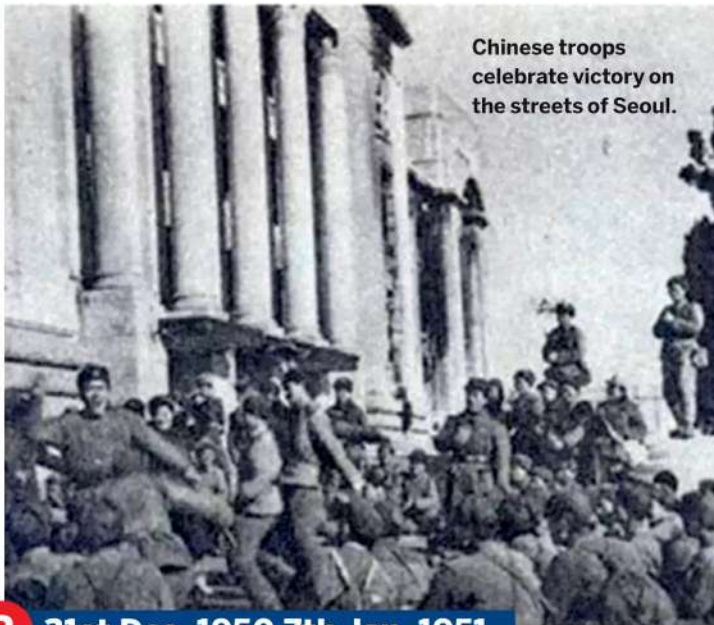
South Korean forces in the city could not hold firm against the North Korean Soviet T-34 tanks, supported by artillery.

The south side lacked antitank weapons and they did not have their own tanks.

On 27th June, South Korea's president, Syngman Rhee, was

evacuated, and to stop the invasion, he decided to blow up the Hangang Bridge in the centre of the city.

The next day, 1.6 tonnes of TNT were detonated under the bridge, which collapsed. But since the authorities had not provided prior warning of the bombing, there were 4,000 refugees on the bridge. 500-1,000 of them died. 🇺🇸



Chinese troops celebrate victory on the streets of Seoul.

3 31st Dec, 1950-7th Jan, 1951

US evacuates after Chinese New Year offensive

★ New Year's Eve 1950: the Chinese People's Volunteer Army began to threaten the border along the 38th parallel as they had begun pushing UN forces back south to drive them into the sea.

On 3rd January, it became apparent that the US Eighth Army in Seoul had been completely overwhelmed by the hordes of Chinese infantry that appeared.

New supreme commander Major General Matthew Ridgway therefore decided to evacuate the South Korean capital, which again fell under the control of the communists.

The Chinese attempt to break the UN's efforts, however, had almost the opposite effect – after it intervened, the US willingness to help South Korea increased. 🇺🇸

2 22nd-25th Sept, 1950

MacArthur

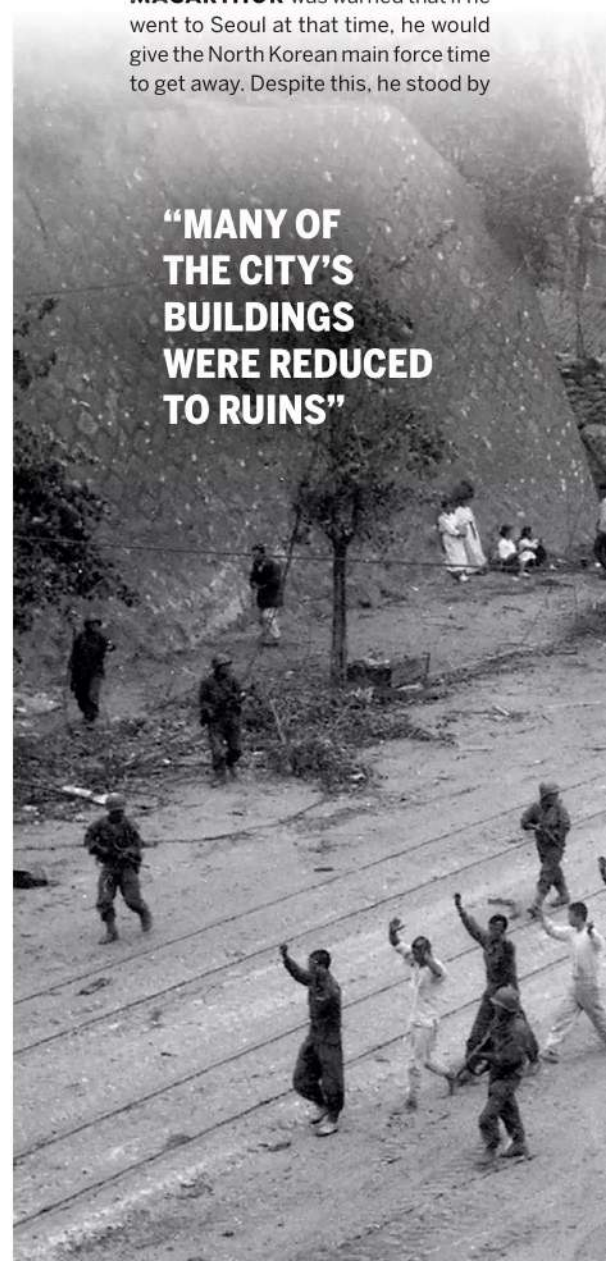
★ Following General Douglas MacArthur's daring landing at Inchon (now Incheon), a new front was established in the Korean War in September 1950.

MacArthur had promised Rhee that the South Korean capital would be recaptured as quickly as possible.

But at the same time, the landing at Inchon had surprised the North Korean leaders and provided an excellent opportunity to cut off their main strength in the south.

MACARTHUR was warned that if he went to Seoul at that time, he would give the North Korean main force time to get away. Despite this, he stood by

"MANY OF THE CITY'S BUILDINGS WERE REDUCED TO RUINS"



keeps his promise

his promise to the South Korean president and entered Seoul.

However, the route was tough. 7,000 of North Korea's best-trained soldiers stood between the newly landed US forces and the South Korean capital.

THE COMMUNISTS did their best to delay the Americans with counterattacks using tanks and planes, but the damage they inflicted on MacArthur failed to stop him.


The advance on Seoul occurred from three sides: west, south and south-east. MacArthur's troops tried to block the road in case the

North Koreans in the south attempted to come to the aid of their troops in Seoul.

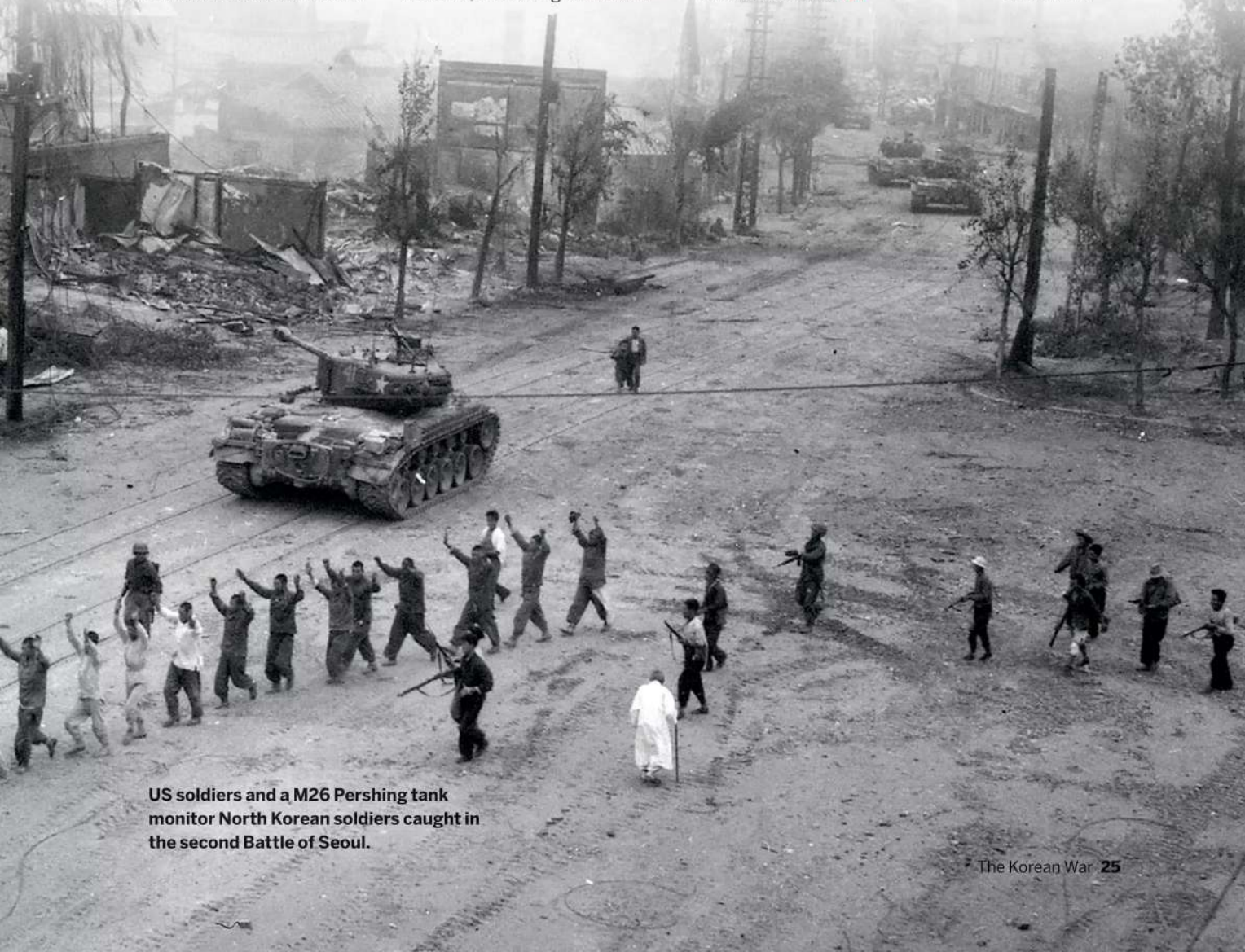
But even without help, the city was heavily fortified and full of motivated defenders.

WHEN US Marines moved into Seoul on 22nd September, heavy fighting followed as they fought from house to house expelling as many of the entrenched North Korean soldiers as possible.

This tactical approach caused devastation and many of the city's buildings were reduced to ruins. However, increasing losses and

the need for good news led US commanders to declare victory in Seoul on 25th September, despite the fact gunfire could still be heard across the city as US Marines continued to battle with the entrenched North Korean defenders. 

MacArthur had promised Syngman Rhee he'd try and recapture Seoul as soon as possible. Picture from 1948.



US soldiers and a M26 Pershing tank monitor North Korean soldiers caught in the second Battle of Seoul.

THE BATTLES OF SEOUL

4 14th-15th March, 1951

Attack to kill

★ In March 1951, The Eighth Army's supreme commander Matthew Ridgway launched Operation Ripper, its intention to expel as many of the Chinese and North Korean forces as possible with minimal losses to his own forces. The attack was a follow-up to an operation launched in February with the same goal, which had gone under the more revealing name of Operation Killer.

The idea was that communist forces would be pushed north past the Han River, and the assault force consisted of four

corps: the US I, IX and X Corps, and the South Korean III Corps. The attack was preceded by a massive artillery bombardment. Then the US 25th Infantry Division crossed quickly.

A few days later, the offensive continued, and the evening of 14th March, Seoul was captured for the fourth time during the war, which is why Operation Ripper is also called the Fourth Battle of Seoul.

After Seoul, the advance slowed. Chinese and North Koreans fought successful battles in the mountainous



landscape. Since the North's forces were constantly on the retreat, it was difficult to achieve the secondary goal of reducing their number dramatically. However, by the end of the month the UN had reached the 38th parallel. ★

American soldiers with a Browning machine gun during Operation Ripper.

4 22nd April-20th May, 1951

Last attempt ended with trench warfare

★ Seoul was the first target when the Chinese started its Spring Offensive on 22nd April, 1951. Commander Peng Dehuai had promised Mao to recapture the city as a 1st May gift to the dictator. To this end he planned to use three army corps with a total of 270,000 men.

The first clashes occurred in the Battle of the Imjin River from 22nd-

25th April. Who emerged victorious is contentious, but it's clear the UN forces – including the British 29th Infantry Brigade – managed to keep the Chinese at bay to protect the eastern flank of the 1st South Korean Division and the western flank of the US 3rd Infantry Division.

Instead, Chinese forces were stopped along a line just north of

Seoul, along the so-called 'No-name Line'.

The Chinese launched a second wave on 15th May, but this attack was also halted after five days.

At the end of the month, the UN counterattacked, pushing the Chinese back to the 38th parallel where the front was stabilised in a trench war. ★



An American 8-inch Howitzer from 96th Field Artillery Battalion at the front on 6th May, 1951.

This is a black and white aerial photograph of Seoul, South Korea, taken in September 1951. The image shows a wide river, likely the Han River, flowing through the city. Two prominent bridges are visible: a long, narrow pedestrian bridge on the left and a larger, multi-arched bridge further down. The city is densely packed with buildings, many of which appear to be damaged or in ruins, particularly in the lower right quadrant. The background shows rolling hills and mountains under a clear sky. The text "SEOUL WAS THE FIRST TARGET WHEN THE CHINESE STARTED ITS SPRING OFFENSIVE" is overlaid in the upper right corner.

**"SEOUL WAS THE FIRST TARGET
WHEN THE CHINESE STARTED
ITS SPRING OFFENSIVE"**

Aerial Photo of Seoul's
market district in
September 1951.

**"CUT OFF THE SUPPLY AND YOU CUT OFF THE
ATTACK. THAT WAS MACARTHUR'S PLAN."**



US Marines aboard landing craft head towards Inchon on 15th September, 1950. UN ships shelled the beach in advance, sparking fires along the shoreline.

The landing at Inchon in 1950 was a turning point in the Korean War, but the treacherous tides meant that MacArthur's plan was a big risk for the allies.



THE INCHON GAMBLE

At 07.00 on 13th September, 1950, the largest naval force assembled since the invasion of Okinawa at the end of World War II neared the Korean port city of Inchon (now Incheon). 261 vessels, including four aircraft carriers, two escort carriers, six cruisers, 33 destroyers, 15 frigates and at least 120 landing craft made up Joint Task Force Seven (JTF 7).

Inchon lay just six kilometres south-west of Seoul, and would provide a perfect base for a bold counteroffensive against the North Korean invaders. The landing was risky, though, and no one knew if the gamble would pay off.

In summer 1945, Japanese occupation forces were replaced in Korea by troops from the Soviet Union and the US, and the nation was split along the 38th parallel. The Soviets took control of the north, the US the south.

On the morning of 25th June, 1950, North Korea's dictator Kim Il-Sung attempted to use force to reunite the Korean Peninsula under communist rule. Three days later, Seoul fell into North Korean hands.

In a surprise move, the UN Security Council responded by giving member states a mandate to defend South Korea with direct military action. The Soviets, who might have been expected to

BATTLE OF INCHON

► veto the decision, were powerless to act because they were boycotting the council at the time.

AN INTERNATIONAL FORCE was assembled. The US contributed the greatest number of troops, but 15 other countries, including Britain, also sent armed forces to the region, while five others supplied field hospitals and medical personnel. Despite the UN's intervention, by August 1950 the North Koreans had advanced to the southern tip of the peninsula and the defenders were fighting a desperate holding action around the city of Pusan (now Busan). Victory seemed imminent for the North Koreans.

The allied troops had established a 37-kilometre defensive line around Pusan, which was based in part on the Nakdong River. At first, the UN force's position seemed grave, but as summer turned to autumn, the North Korean offensive stalled, and their already perilously stretched supply lines came under attack from US bombers. The immediate danger of a breach in the line was over.

The appointed commander of the UN force, General Douglas MacArthur, believed a landing in the North Korean rear would be the most efficient way to force the enemy to withdraw. Cutting North Korean supply lines would cause their front to

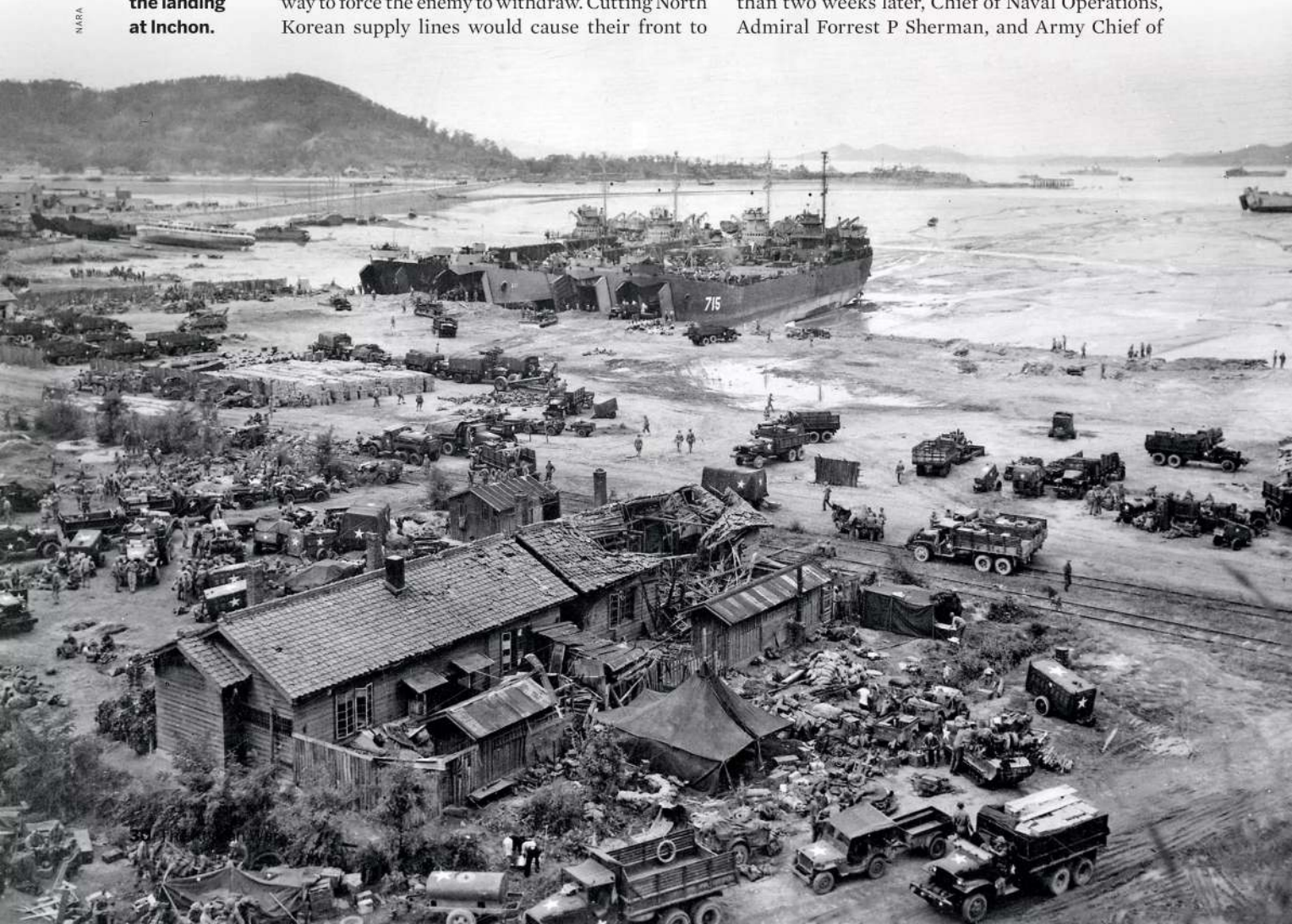
"WITH MACARTHUR AT THE HELM, WHO COULD DOUBT THE PLAN WOULD SUCCEED?"

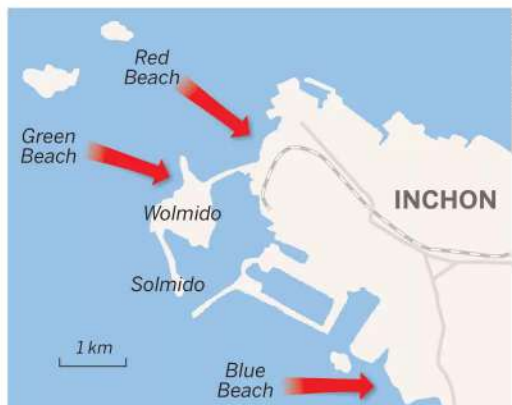
collapse and trigger a major withdraw, he argued, and would be a far less costly approach than trying to push their enemy back, step-by-step, in a long series of offensives. The issue was where to make the landing. There were numerous easier possibilities, but while navigating into Inchon harbour would be extremely challenging, the city had two major advantages as a landing site: it was South Korea's second largest port with 250,000 inhabitants and it lay just six kilometres from Seoul.

THE SOUTH KOREAN capital was the logistical centre of the North Korean invasion. Almost all the equipment and weapons destined for the front line were routed through its transport hubs. Cut off the supply and you cut off the attack. That was MacArthur's plan.

The general presented his scheme for an amphibious landing at Inchon on 12th August. Less than two weeks later, Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Forrest P Sherman, and Army Chief of

**US LST
(Landing, Ship,
Tank) ships
unload soldiers
and equipment
on Red Beach
the day after
the landing
at Inchon.**





The UN force took Green Beach in the morning, but were forced to wait until the evening tide before approaching their two remaining targets.

Staff, General J Lawton Collins, flew to Tokyo for a conference with MacArthur and other Pacific region and Korean War commanders. Many of those present were sceptical about the proposed endeavour, particularly given the difficult tides in the area. MacArthur stuck to his guns though, and finally managed to persuade his listeners that while his inspired plan wouldn't be easy, it was at least feasible. Plus, with MacArthur at the helm, who could doubt the plan would succeed? As the indomitable general put it, "We shall land at Inchon, and I shall crush them". On 28th August, the Joint Chiefs of Staff approved Operation Chromite, the codename given to the daring offensive.

The problematic tides still needed to be overcome. The task force's approach involved navigating the Flying Fish Channel, which was dotted with small islands, some of which were fortified.

THE AREA ALSO has the largest littoral zone in Asia and one of the widest tidal ranges in the world with a 10-metre difference between high and low tide. This meant that the landing could only happen at high tide because the harbour was protected by a mud flat six kilometres wide that was exposed at all other times. Shallows and sandbanks made passage almost impossible. Only precise navigation would take the task force safely through to the port, which meant getting hold of reliable charts and tide tables.

Korea had been occupied by Japan from 1910 until the end of World War II and the Imperial Navy had diligently mapped the peninsula's waterways and coastal areas during that time, producing relatively modern maritime maps. These charts were used to help plan the best approach to Inchon from the sea.

In addition, two intelligence teams – the first led by American Eugene Clark and the second by South Korean Youn Joung – were dispatched two weeks before the landing to collect detailed local



Grappling hooks secure the landing craft as marines with M1 carbines scramble from their boat across a dyke at Inchon.

knowledge about defence works. The South Korean islanders revealed the location of coastal batteries and beach-side bunkers. The officers radioed their findings back to Tokyo: the area was defended, but not heavily so. Two battalions from the 226th Independent Marine Regiment, supported by two companies from the 918th Artillery Regiment defended the port and city of Inchon along with the Kimpo (now Gimpo) airfield. The North Koreans had around 2,500 men with a dozen batteries on the coast and numerous bunkers and other protective works on the beaches.

While the allies prepared well for the landing, their success was also down to luck. Soviet naval officers were sent to North Korea to help deploy mines around the coastline. They inspected Inchon as part of this effort but dismissed the idea of mining the approaches to the port, believing that the tides offered sufficient protection to prevent any enemy landing there. They believed it would be better to focus on defending softer targets. It was a catastrophic mistake for the communists – even a small number of mines could have sunk the alliance's plan.

In the lead up to the operation, MacArthur appointed Major General Edward Mallory 'Ned' Almond as the commander of the newly formed amphibious landing force, X Corps. This wasn't because Almond had any experience of amphibious warfare, but because he'd helped plan Operation Chromite in his role as MacArthur's Chief of Staff.

Born in Virginia, Almond was an infantry general who'd fought in both world wars. Cultivating connections made during his time at Virginia Military Institute, he was promoted to command of the 92nd Division during World War II. His unit performed badly in combat in Italy, a fact that he attributed to it being filled

FORCES

 **UN ALLIANCE**

Soldiers: 71,339

Losses: 196

 **NORTH KOREA**

Soldiers: 2,500

Losses: Unknown



A carrier-based F4U-4B Corsair fighter-bomber sweeps across the US invasion fleet at Inchon on 15th September, 1950.

US NAVY

► almost exclusively with African American soldiers. Desperate to avoid any personal blame, he even went so far as to advise the US Defense Department to stop deploying African Americans to front-line positions, claiming that they abandoned their posts too easily: “No white man wants to be accused of leaving the battle line. The Negro doesn’t care.”

Almond’s fiery temper led to clashes with senior commanders in the 1st Marine Division, which formed a part of X Corps, and in the Eighth Army at Pusan. Historians have criticised Almond for being arrogant and overconfident, which led to an allied disaster later in the conflict. Maury Holden, a staff officer, famously summarised the prickly, gung-ho general, saying that: “When it paid to be aggressive, Ned was aggressive. When it paid to be cautious, Ned was aggressive.”

ALTHOUGH THE US military had considerable experience of amphibious operations from World War II, including in the Pacific region, X Corps was made up of relatively inexperienced forces. The 1st Marine Division had just arrived from California, while the 7th Infantry Division, the second division in Almond’s new command, had been seriously depleted after being left in Japan when the rest of

the Eighth Army had sailed for Korea. The army had drawn replacements from the 7th in the opening months of the war, and it had to be refilled in the weeks before the landing at Inchon with 6,000 officers and enlisted men from the US.

It was clear that even with this fresh injection of manpower, the division would not be up to full strength in time and so half-trained South Korean recruits were deployed, with approximately 100 soldiers being attached to each rifle company and artillery battery. These South Korean troops were known as KATUSAs (Korean Augmentation to the United States Army) or ROKs (Republic of Korea).

X Corps was reinforced by US Tactical Air Command and by regulars from the Republic of Korea in the shape of the 17th Infantry Regiment and the 1st Marine Division. The X Corps consisted of 71,339 men, many of them South Korean. In addition to the KATUSAs, South Korea provided some of the most experienced troops in the corps.

Having assembled their forces, the allies opted to make two sets of landings to coincide with the high tide times on 15th September, 1950. The first was scheduled for 06.59 and the second for 19.19. The allies knew that if necessary they could hold off and wait for subsequent high tides, but no one wanted

any delays: Pusan was still under attack, and while the allies' situation had improved, no-one knew how long the North Korean offensive could be held.

INSTEAD, IT WAS decided that the landing at Inchon should coincide with a coordinated attack across the bridgehead at Pusan. UN commanders hoped that the two simultaneous attacks would break the North Korean force. They would then be free to liberate Seoul and chase the remnants of the enemy army back over the demilitarised zone.

On 10th September, five days before the planned landing, 43 Corsair planes took off from the escort cruisers *USS Sicily* and *USS Badoeng Strait*. Their target was the island of Wolmido, their payload 50 tonnes of napalm. The pilots dropped the lethal canisters on the eastern slopes of the island, torching any potential obstacles or threats.

The following day, Vice Admiral Arthur D Struble, commander of JTF 7, was studying the weather reports. The task force included vessels from six nations – the US, UK, New Zealand, Canada, France and South Korea – alongside hired civilian and transport ships from Japan. It was the largest naval force in the post-WWII era, and its size wouldn't be equalled again until the Gulf War in 1991, but it was still no match for the typhoon that was heading for Japan. As timing was crucial, Struble decided to weigh anchor a day ahead of schedule and left Kobe in Japan on 11th September, 1950. Operation Chromite was underway.

ON 13TH SEPTEMBER, the UN forces hit Wolmido again. The US heavy cruisers *USS Toledo* and *USS Rochester* joined with the British light cruisers *HMS Kenya* and *HMS Jamaica* to bombard the batteries on the island. Covered by Corsair aircraft, six destroyers ventured closer and shelled the fortifications. The North Korean batteries returned fire, killing one marine and wounding eight others. Another day saw the job complete: by the evening of the 14th September, the coalition had destroyed the last of Wolmido's batteries.

At 00.50 on 15th September, Clark, the leader of one of the two intelligence teams still undercover on the ground, fired up the lighthouse at Palmido, helping guide the UN landing forces into Inchon.

MacArthur's planners had identified three landing sites designated as Red Beach, Green Beach and Blue Beach. Just after 06.00, about one hour before high tide, troops from 3rd Battalion, 5th Marine Corps boarded their landing craft. 30 minutes later they waded towards the shore of Wolmido island, with the objective of securing Green Beach. After the relentless shelling of the previous two days, North Korean resistance consisted of a few sporadic shots, and even that

“LESS THAN ONE HOUR AFTER THE UN LANDED, THE BATTLE WAS OVER”

pitiful defence ceased when the US rolled out their Pershing and Sherman tanks. Less than one hour after the UN landed, the battle was over. 45 North Koreans were captured and the small neighbouring island of Solmido also fell with relative ease.

Having captured their first objective at Green Beach, the allies were forced to wait until the evening tide before the 5th Marine Regiment could push on to take Red Beach, which was to the west of Inchon, and the 1st Marine Regiment could advance towards its objective at Blue Beach, which was Inchon's port. As the marines rested, the two targets were softened up with preliminary air strikes and naval bombardments.

TWILIGHT WAS APPROACHING as the tide flooded once more. It was 18.30 and smoke drifted around the bombed city and the harbour. As though poor visibility wasn't enough of an obstacle, US troops were forced to carry ladders to scale four- and five-metre high defensive walls designed to repel attacks from the sea. North Korean resistance also proved much tougher than it had on the islands. Despite the problems, the marines secured their objectives just before midnight. D-day was over. The cost was 21 dead or missing and 174 wounded. North Korean losses are unknown.

Minor bridgeheads were secured using a mixture of surprise and overwhelmingly superior firepower. ►

A US medic treats a civilian wounded during the landing at Inchon.



HARBOY/PICTURE POST/HULTON ARCHIVE/GETTY

BATTLE OF INCHON

- There was little resistance as the troops pushed out into the city. A column of six North Korean T-34 tanks was destroyed by a US napalm attack on the road between Seoul and Inchon on 16th September. On the 17th, US Marines ambushed another six T-34s from the North Korean 42nd Mechanised Regiment along with 200-300 infantry troops from the 18th Infantry Division.

BY 18TH SEPTEMBER, Inchon was secured, enabling the 7th Infantry Division and the South Korean forces to land. While the South Koreans took care of the last remaining pockets of resistance inside Inchon, the 5th Marine Regiment cleared defenders from the Kimpo Airfield, allowing US Tactical Air Command to use it as a base for its Corsair fighters.

A week later, the attack on Seoul began. The capital succumbed just as quickly as its neighbouring port city and was in UN hands by 28th September.

In the meantime, the Eighth Army at Pusan had succeeded in breaking out across their bridgehead, and quickly pushed the collapsing North Korean army all the way back over the 38th parallel that marked the border between the occupation zones of North and South Korea. The X Corps and the Eighth Army met on 26th September at Osan, three kilometres south of Seoul. The main objective of the Inchon landing had been achieved.

UN troops then chased the retreating army north over the 38th parallel, capturing the North Korean capital, Pyongyang, in October. However, when the

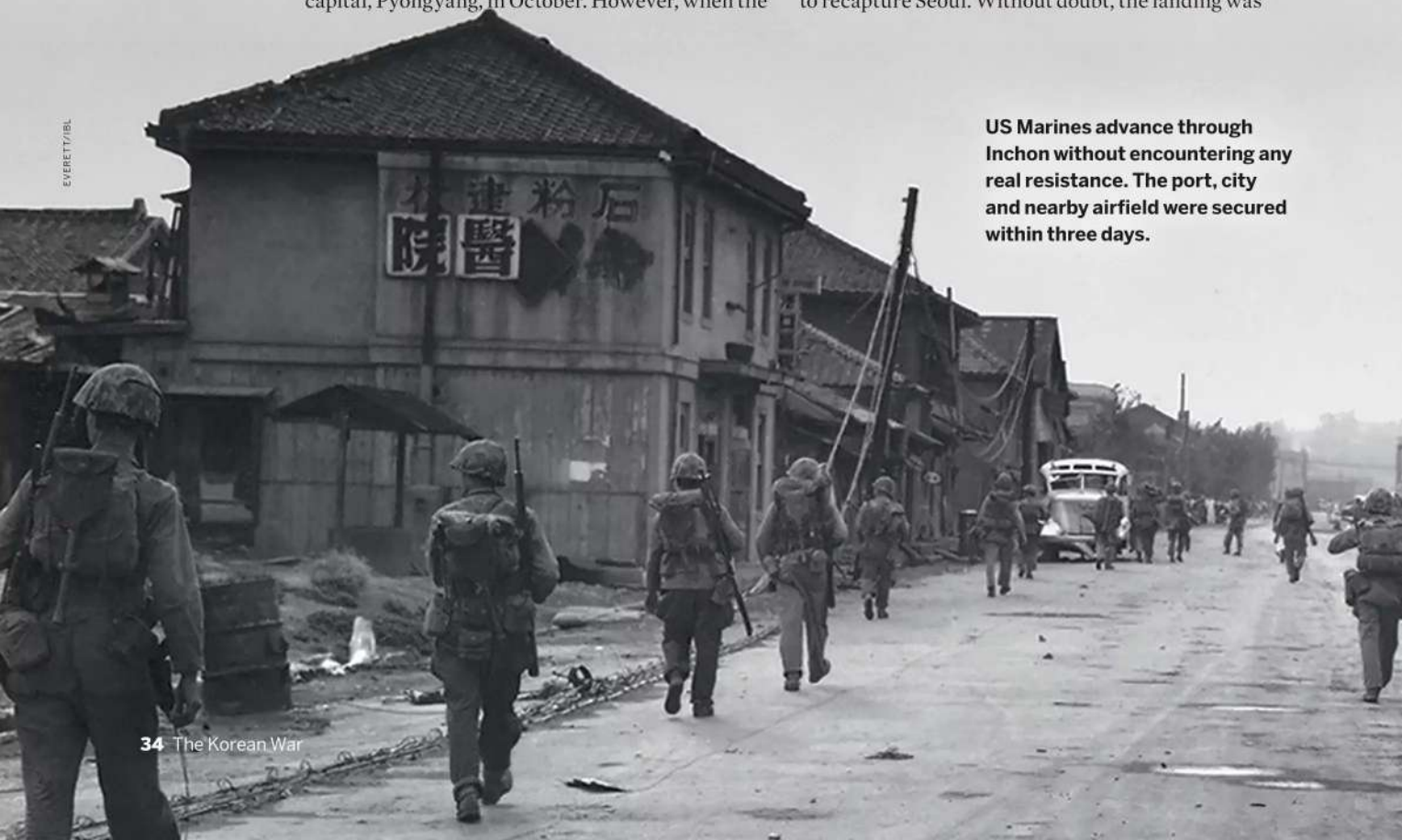
“THE LANDING LED TO A CRUCIAL SHIFT IN THE EVOLUTION OF THE KOREAN WAR”

UN forces approached the Yalu River, the border between Korea and China, Mao chose to intervene. By the end of October 1950, nearly 400,000 Chinese ‘volunteers’ had poured into North Korea and catching an over-confident Almond by surprise, they began to drive the UN troops south. Seoul was once again captured by communist forces, before being re-taken for a second time by the allies.

THE FRONT LINE stabilised along the 38th parallel at the start of summer 1951, and ceasefire negotiations began in July. It took another two years before the hostilities finally ended, though. By the end of the war, 94,000 UN personnel had been killed, 55,000 of them from the US. If you count military and civilian losses, at least three million Koreans from across the peninsula lost their lives, while the number of North Korean and Chinese troops killed is usually reported to be an incredible 1.5 million. The 38th parallel eventually became fixed as the border between the states of North Korea and South Korea and is still monitored by international observers today.

The landing led to a crucial shift in the evolution of the Korean War and it enabled the US-led coalition to recapture Seoul. Without doubt, the landing was

US Marines advance through Inchon without encountering any real resistance. The port, city and nearby airfield were secured within three days.





September 1950. A disabled North Korean T-34 lies abandoned as coalition forces advance from Inchon to Seoul, the South Korean capital.

a well-executed amphibious operation, especially given the difficult tidal problems. There are those who argue that the North Korean defenders in the Inchon area, indeed in much of South Korea, were already exhausted and close to collapse due to allied air strikes. According to this view, North Korea's army would have collapsed even without the landing. Perhaps Inchon and especially Seoul could have been spared some of the destruction visited upon them if the landing had not taken place? Some sceptics claim that the landing was simply an exercise to raise the profile of both MacArthur and the Marine Corps.

SUCH SUGGESTIONS ARE mere speculation, of course. What we can safely say is that MacArthur correctly identified Inchon as a key that could unlock the whole of South Korea. The landing was well-planned and well-executed, and it achieved its goal of releasing the Eighth Army from its

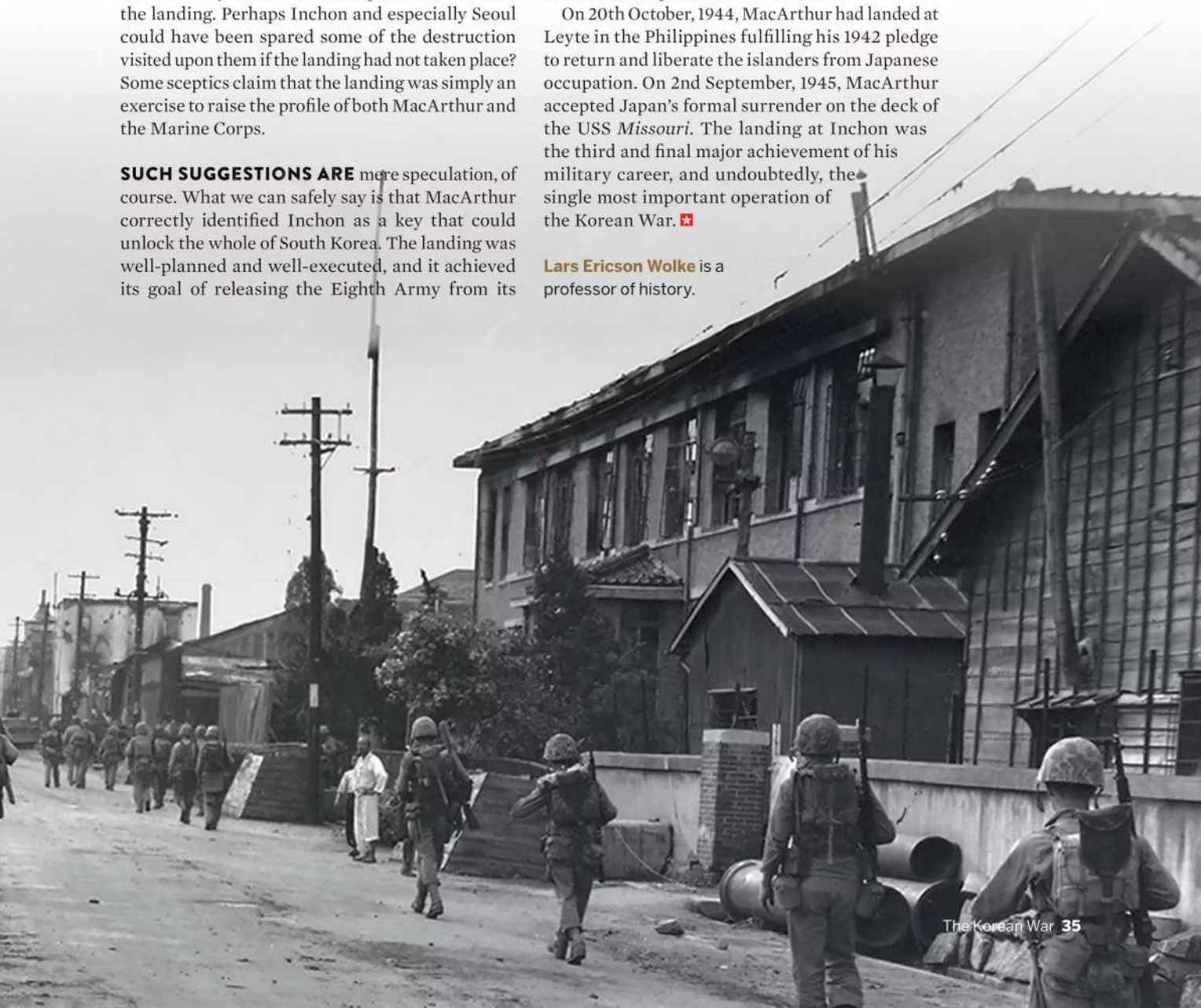
precarious position around Pusan. Further, the operation incurred relatively few US casualties. The X Corps lost 536 soldiers in the landing at Inchon and the subsequent recapture of Seoul, with a further 2,550 wounded. The Corps leaders estimated that the North Korean force lost around 21,000 men in the same two weeks. However, it was possibly the South Korean civilians, exposed to the merciless horrors of a modern war zone, who suffered the most.

ON 17TH SEPTEMBER, two days after the first marines had waded towards land, MacArthur followed. Accompanied by Almond and Struble, the flamboyant general met with the marines who had made the assault. There, in front of a set of broken T-34 tanks and before carefully selected members of the press, MacArthur pinned medals on chests and posed for the cameras.

On 20th October, 1944, MacArthur had landed at Leyte in the Philippines fulfilling his 1942 pledge to return and liberate the islanders from Japanese occupation. On 2nd September, 1945, MacArthur accepted Japan's formal surrender on the deck of the USS *Missouri*. The landing at Inchon was the third and final major achievement of his military career, and undoubtedly, the single most important operation of the Korean War. ❖

Lars Ericson Wolke is a professor of history.

Further reading:
Victory at High Tide – the Inchon-Seoul Campaign (1968, revised 1979) by Robert Debs Heinl Jr



Yalu Offensive, 1951

CHINESE FOOL

Chinese troops at the front during the Yalu Offensive in 1951. Their forces were primarily infantry.

BRIDGEMAN/IBL

THE ENEMY

When the UN troops' offensive reached the Yalu River in the north, the Chinese giant finally woke. 300,000 men were inserted into a massive counterattack. UN forces were taken by surprise and didn't understand the powerful enemy they faced. Chinese forces only moved at night and remained hidden by day.

Text: **ANDERS FAGER**

**"ON THE SAME DAY THAT
PYONGYANG FELL TO THE
UN FORCE, THE CHINESE
BEGAN TO SMUGGLE
NEARLY 300,000 MEN
INTO NORTH KOREA"**

YALU OFFENSIVE, 1951

By November 1950, the Korean War had reached the northernmost parts of North Korea. The North Korean army who just four months earlier had invaded South Korea and besieged Pusan (now Busan) in the south-east had been broken. Now the remnants were on the run from General MacArthur's US-led UN coalition. On 1st October, MacArthur had invaded North Korea and its capital Pyongyang fell on 19th October. Now the Yalu, which marked the border with China, was in his sights in addition to a final victory.

One must learn a little about the country's geography to understand the operations in North Korea. The eastern side of Korea is made up of mountain chains that isolate the North Korean isthmus to the north-east from the western, more low-lying parts. The war had so far been fought on the western side of the peninsula, following a line from Pyongyang and Seoul down to Busan in the south-east. Along this axis, the US Eighth Army operated under the command of General Walton Walker, while on the other side of the mountains the X Corps under General Edward Almond had landed to advance through the mountains in the north-east.

Initially, the invasion had gone well and the bad roads posed a bigger problem than the North Korean army. However, discipline in the Eighth Army had become lax, as it stopped performing necessary security measures because it appeared there was virtually no enemy left to guard against.

China had already declared to the UN in August that it considered North Korea a friend to protect, but Mao was worried that the United Nations coalition, as MacArthur had hinted, would attack China if it intervened, and he found himself arguing with Stalin over how much they dared to raise the stakes.

Stalin tried to order Mao to intervene militarily, but Mao demanded support from Stalin. After the

“MACARTHUR CLAIMED IT WASN'T IMPORTANT WHETHER THE CHINESE INTERVENED OR NOT, BECAUSE HE WOULD WIPE THEM OUT ANYWAY.”

promise of Soviet fighters being put at his disposal, Mao took the decision to attack during the first week of October. The Chinese army in Manchuria was renamed the People's Volunteer Army to emphasise that the operation was a popular expression that Mao had no control over.

On the same day that Pyongyang fell to UN forces, the Chinese began to smuggle nearly 300,000 men into North Korea. The eight relatively small Chinese armies were led by the highly competent General Peng Dehuai, a veteran of the war against the Japanese.

The Chinese forces only moved at night, remaining hidden during the day, but it's still not clear how the UN coalition intelligence services, aided by unchallenged reconnaissance from the air, overlooked the massive troop deployment. Like many other similar cases, the signs were all there, but they chose not to see them. MacArthur took most of the blame afterwards. He was bold bordering on foolhardy and interpreted reality as he wanted it to be. In addition, he directed the war largely from his office in Tokyo, giving him little sense of the true situation on the battlefield.

In mid-October, MacArthur met President Truman on the island of Wake. MacArthur explained that victory was in sight, and that troops would probably be “home for Christmas”.

He told him to plan an end offensive, and that when it came to the Chinese, MacArthur was sure they were bluffing and that he'd be mandated to enter China and destroy the bases that supplied the North Korean forces. MacArthur claimed it wasn't important whether the Chinese intervened or not, because he would wipe them out anyway. (Truman left few impressions of these private talks. He, like many others, was blinded by the media's darling, who regarded Asia as his own private domain.)

On 24th October, the South Korean 8th Infantry Division marched right into Chinese forces at Onjong in the north-west of North Korea. During five days of fighting, the division lost almost 70 percent of its men in addition to most of its heavy equipment. The Chinese soldiers fought ferociously and had the uncomfortable ability to constantly outflank their heavier-armed, but less manoeuvrable, opponents. They would suddenly appear behind them, cutting off their road to an orderly retreat, so South Korean soldiers were forced to flee one by one. Peng was

Chinese soldiers attack. The usual attack was to overwhelm the enemy with large numbers of foot soldiers.



A defeated US tank crew surrenders to Chinese soldiers.



criticised by Mao for the battle's premature start, something Peng couldn't have avoided. But the general took full advantage of the confusion to penetrate deeper into the UN battle formations, something the coalition failed to learn from. After the defeat, Chinese prisoners emerged on the UN side, but they made no impression on MacArthur. Soon US forces would also encounter Chinese soldiers in the north-west, but MacArthur didn't care about that or reports that X Corps had been in violent clashes with Chinese forces on the east coast.

A week later, on 1st November, the US 8th Cavalry Regiment battled with Chinese forces north of Unsan in the north-west. After a day of hard fighting, the Americans were forced to withdraw only to discover their retreat path was blocked. The regiment was broken into small groups that fled southwards. It was one of the most devastating defeats in US history, but one the Chinese couldn't exploit due to a lack of food and ammunition. But again – despite the writing clearly being on the wall – it still failed to make an impression on MacArthur.

The fighting ebbed away, the Chinese retreated and while Peng had learned much from their victories and argued with Mao about the army's miserable supplies, MacArthur held a confused correspondence with Truman. There might be Chinese in North Korea, he wrote, and they might

also be a threat. But on the other hand, they'd be defenceless against MacArthur's massive offensive.

MacArthur claimed to know there might be around 30,000 Chinese soldiers in North Korea (the true figure was closer to 300,000). He suggested the air force bomb bridges over the Yalu, which was technically Chinese, but received a flat no to this proposal from Washington. He'd previously publicly stated that "it is in the pattern of Oriental psychology to respect and follow aggressive, resolute and dynamic leadership"; now he informed the world press (and thus Peng) that his "Home-by-Christmas Offensive" would begin on 24th November.

MacArthur's offensive was launched as winter arrived in North Korea. Many UN soldiers didn't even have coats, despite celebrating Thanksgiving a few days previously. The next day, Peng's counteroffensive hit the UN alliance like a sledgehammer. In the western part of Korea, the fighting at the Chongchon river became the focal point of the operation. This battle was fought in temperatures that dipped below minus 30 degrees Centigrade.

Even though the UN forces had over three times as much artillery as their opponents, the front line was continually pierced as Chinese forces bypassed their enemies and attacked the centre. Peng's attacks concentrated on the South Korean II Corps on the



BRIDGEMAN/IBL

The Chinese army was led by General Peng, who had extensive experience from the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-45).

YALU OFFENSIVE, 1951

- ▶ right wing of the Eighth Army. Peng had judged the situation perfectly, assuming the less heavily armed South Koreans would be easier to attack, and in five days the II Corps was torn apart and sent on the run. Not only had Peng opened a road to the Eighth Army, he'd also driven a wedge between the army and X Corps, allowing Chinese forces to march southwards through the mountains towards Seoul.

Despite being told the Eighth Army's right flank had run into problems, General Walker insisted the northern offensive should continue. A few days later, Peng attacked the central part of the UN forces to both devastating and confusing effect. The Chinese played music to lure those who fled, sent suicide bombers against command staff and dressed its soldiers as South Koreans to wreak havoc. They also took advantage of every gap to penetrate deep behind enemy lines.

The UN forces were soon forced to retreat, and Peng went after their escape routes. One of many skirmishes involved the Turkish UN brigade who took brutal losses to delay the Chinese advance and allow other divisions to escape.

Peng tried to surround the Eighth Army, but he was too ambitious, and it got away. The worst passage during the UN forces' retreat was perhaps what became known as "The Gauntlet", a ten-kilometre mountain pass where the entire 2nd Infantry Division were surprised by Chinese machine guns, resulting in burning vehicles and numerous wounded troops. By

2nd December, the Eighth Army had largely escaped the Chinese, and a few days later the situation was more or less under control, largely because the Chinese were also ending their offensive. General Walker decided – without consulting MacArthur – that they should withdraw and abandon Pyongyang, which Peng's divisions occupied on 5th December.

On the other side of the mountains, Almond's X Corps had advanced, spread across a 25-kilometre-wide front. The US 1st Marine Division marched towards the Chosin Reservoir and because they'd already encountered the Chinese, were on alert and prepared in a way no other forces had during the critical first day of MacArthur's offensive (this while Almond mocked them to hurry and "don't let a bunch of Chinese laundrymen stop you").

On 28th November, the Chinese attacked and the following day the 1st Marine Division and 30,000 men were surrounded. Disaster loomed, although the Chinese generals' ambition to crush the Chosin pocket allowed many other US troops to escape.

The same day, MacArthur summoned his commanders to a meeting in Tokyo to discuss the Chinese counterattack (instead of going to see his embattled troops on the ground). MacArthur finally realised there were enough Chinese in North Korea to both drive his troops back and take Seoul at the same time. In the space of just a few days he'd suffered a defeat that was worse than anything the Americans had experienced in World War II.

Back at Chosin, the Chinese realised that they couldn't take on the heavily armed marines directly, and so aimed at besieging them instead. But on 30th November, the marines finally received permission to retreat. For 13 days they battled south towards rescue via the harbour at Hungnam. The incredibly harsh fighting took place over 20 kilometres of barely accessible mountainous terrain while temperatures dropped to minus 20 degrees.

It was a nightmare, despite the United States Marine Corps' famous slogan: "Retreat, hell! We're attacking in a different direction!" It was difficult to carry the wounded and any who couldn't walk soon froze to death. In one case, the retreat was halted when a bridge over a ravine had been blown to pieces, a problem they managed to solve by bringing in a new bridge span by helicopter. It was the UN alliance's superiority in the air that saved X Corps, partly through the dropping of hundreds of tonnes of supplies every day, and partly with violent bombardments against any Chinese they saw.

On 15th December, X Corps congregated in a bridgehead around Hungnam having lost more than 15,000 men. That was a victory for Peng, but the Chinese who pursued X Corps through the mountains had suffered even greater losses and were ▶

"MACARTHUR FINALLY REALISED THERE WERE ENOUGH CHINESE IN NORTH KOREA TO DRIVE HIS TROOPS BACK."



Chinese supply troops brave hostile shelling from enemy artillery as they carry ammunition and food to the front.



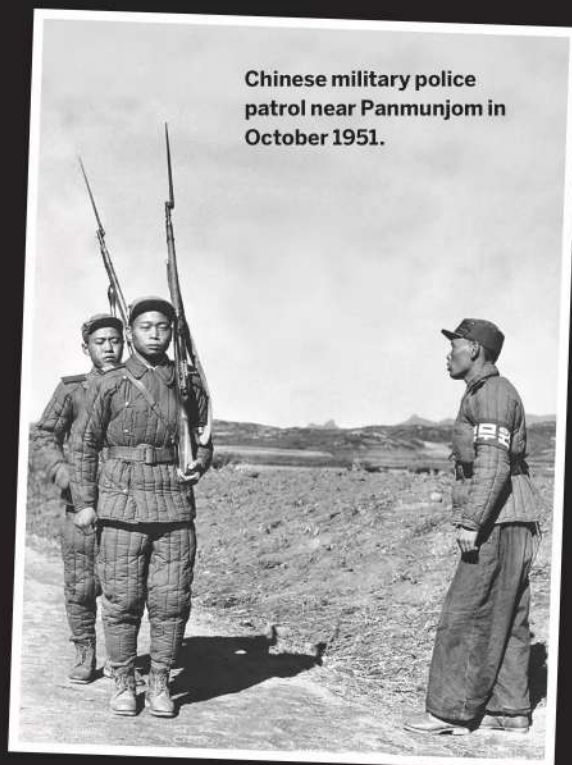
The Chinese army lacked everything – except courage

★ The fighting under Peng's offensive would be replicated during the Vietnam War, but in Korea it took place in snowstorms on mountainous terrain. Peng's forces were equipped to barely World War I standard, but used infiltration and fought in a way that shocked UN forces.

The Chinese encountered problems when they met motivated, well-armed and entrenched US forces. The tactical disparity has been described like comparing one man with a knife fighting another with two chainsaws. Peng possessed almost no artillery, so he couldn't

attack dug-in forces. Peng's armies also suffered for lack of food and ammunition, while UN forces had access to huge food and ammunition supplies during their retreat. Peng's men were split between those who were equipped only with hand grenades and others who relied on weapons they could capture on the battlefield.

The soldiers were also encouraged to rob and try to find food on the battlefield. From this perspective, the pressure that Peng's armies brought to bear on the UN coalition forces was even more impressive.



Chinese military police patrol near Panmunjom in October 1951.

YALU OFFENSIVE, 1951

- ▶ barely able to fight. But despite lacking the power to attack Hungnam, the Chinese had done enough: the Americans started evacuating, mostly because X Corps were needed on the other side of Korea: a total of 200,000 – half that of Dunkirk – were evacuated along with 250,000 tonnes of supplies. The cargo freighter *SS Meredith Victory* set the world record for a single ship – evacuating over 14,000 people in total.

The fighting gradually ebbed away along the old border on the 38th parallel. The Eighth Army had lost 11,000 men and was broken in both heart and mind. It had pulled back over 40 kilometres, something a statistically loving American pointed out was a record for US forces. The fact it hadn't led to even greater losses was partly down to luck, but also due to good leadership and not least because Peng's troops were unable to capitalise on the opportunities they'd created.

The day before Christmas Eve, Walker died in a car crash. He was replaced by the highly experienced General Matthew Ridgway who until his appointment had worked in the Pentagon. A shocked MacArthur gave him a free hand, but Ridgway had barely landed in Korea before a new Chinese offensive was launched on 26th December.

Peng and his generals had – with an unimaginable effort – got his forces ready for battle again, and massive Chinese night attacks, accompanied by kettle drums and trumpets, broke through the Eighth Army's lines. On 4th January, the Chinese captured Seoul, and MacArthur was ready to use nuclear weapons. The UN troops pulled back further by a magnitude of tens of kilometres, but

“MASSIVE CHINESE NIGHT ATTACKS, ACCOMPANIED BY KETTLE DRUMS AND TRUMPETS, BROKE THROUGH THE EIGHTH ARMY'S LINES”

now the Chinese had exhausted their attacking forces, while the UN forces regrouped again under Ridgway's leadership. He removed commanders that were too defensive or ineffective, was careful to let the troops know he was on their side and was keen to prepare for a counteroffensive when ready.

After another stalemate, a new Chinese attack arrived at the end of January. This time, however, the Eighth Army didn't go on the run, and Ridgway began to go on the offensive. In the Roundup and Killer operations in February, he took full advantage of the UN alliance's massive firepower to destroy enemy forces and straighten out the front, and with Operation Ripper, Seoul was liberated on 14th March. This was the fourth time the city had been captured in one year. Only 200,000 inhabitants of the city's original 1.5 million populace remained.

On 11th March, MacArthur was fired after major disagreements with Truman. He was replaced by Ridgway, who commanded the war to a standstill at the current border between North and South Korea. It would take two years before a ceasefire was signed. 🇺🇸

Anders Fager is an author and former army officer.

Ridgway and Peng – generals

★ Depictions of the Korean War usually focus on the bombastic MacArthur and his love for both press conferences and nuclear bombs, while all the other actors are left in the shadows. It's worth highlighting the two highly competent generals Peng and Ridgway to understand the societies they were fighting for.

Matthew Ridgway was born in 1895 and was the son of an artillery colonel. He joined the army and during World War II commanded the legendary 82nd Airborne Division, fighting in

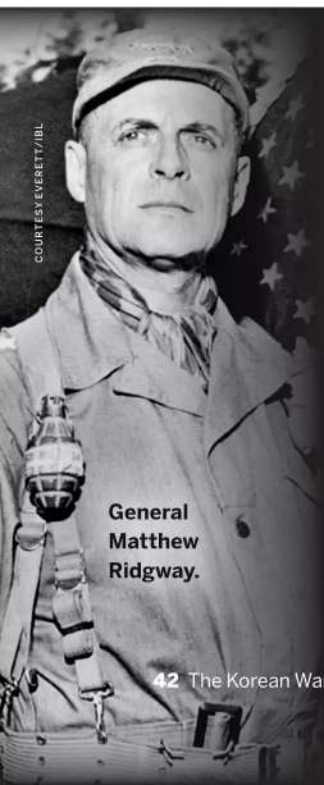
Sicily, Italy and in Normandy while remaining in the shadow of public-relations generals like Patton, MacArthur and Clark.

RIDGWAY WAS born to lead infantry. As a commander, he was efficient, confident and fearless, traits appreciated by those he led. He was also strong enough to stand up to MacArthur. Ridgway's efforts to stabilise the situation after the Chinese offensive was perhaps his greatest achievement and made him the obvious choice to

replace MacArthur as supreme commander in Korea. Although he didn't agree with Eisenhower, he later became NATO's first supreme allied commander and chief of staff of the US Army.

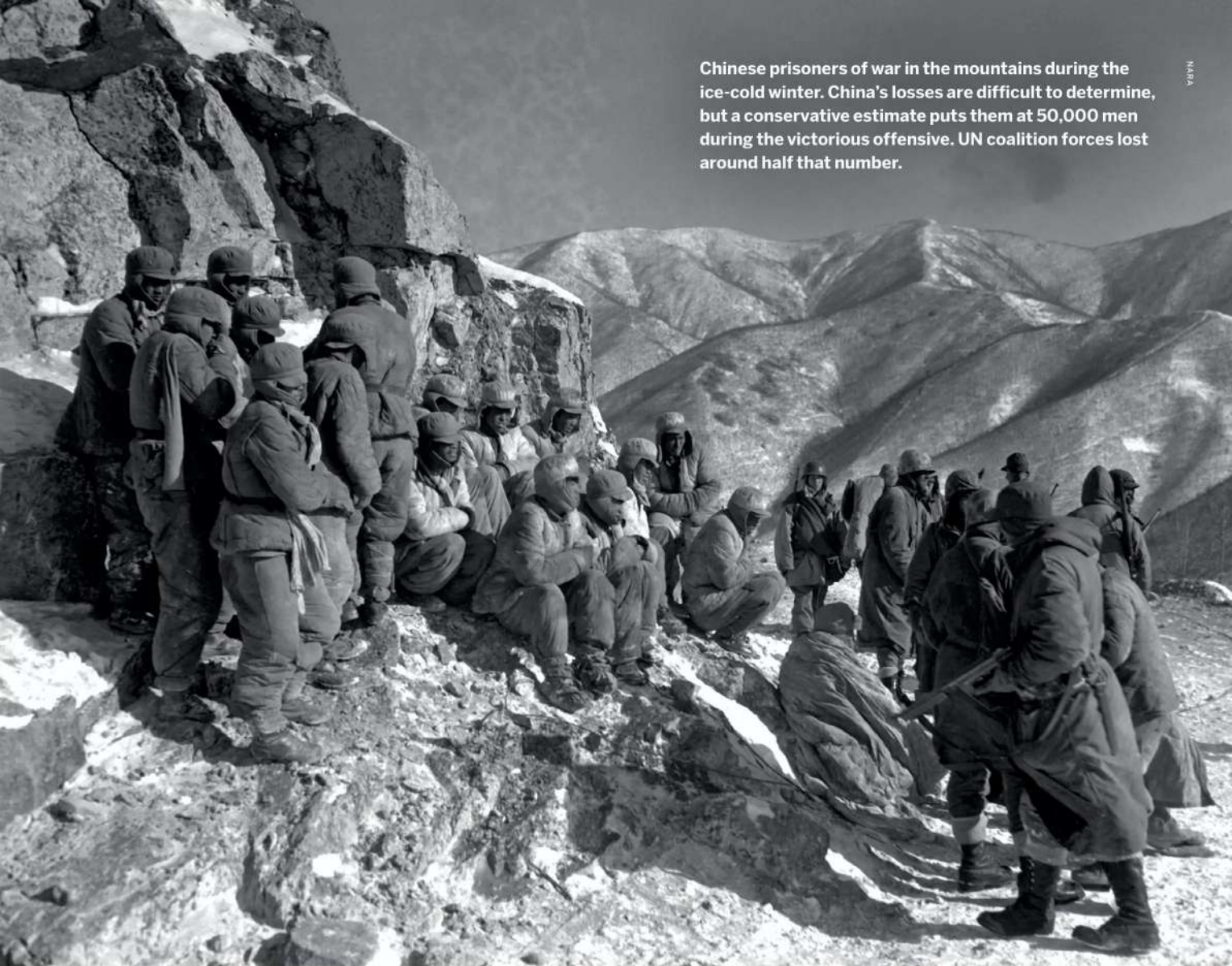
After retiring in 1955, Ridgway continued to work for the United States. He died in 1993, aged 98. During his funeral, General Colin Powell said that, “No soldier ever performed his duty better than this man.”

★ Peng Dehuai was born in 1898 on the lowest rung of Chinese



General
Matthew
Ridgway.

Chinese prisoners of war in the mountains during the ice-cold winter. China's losses are difficult to determine, but a conservative estimate puts them at 50,000 men during the victorious offensive. UN coalition forces lost around half that number.



met on Korean battlefield

society. He had just two years of schooling and faced hunger and deprivation. He enlisted in a Chinese warlord's army at 18 and his qualities as a hard-working NCO led to him being educated to officer level in the Chinese Nationalist Army.

Peng chose Mao's side in 1928 and became one of the communist leader's military workhorses. He was involved in The Long March and the war against the Japanese, commanding ever larger forces. He was often criticised for being

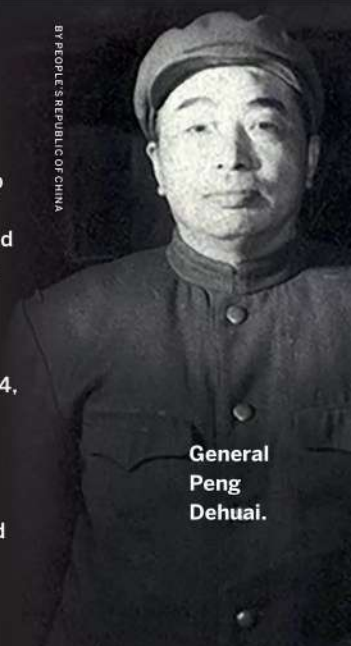
too strong-willed, but escaped with just warnings since he was difficult to replace.

PENG SUPPORTED Mao's war plans in Korea, thus becoming the head of the People's Volunteer Army. He was a master of operating with hungry and weak forces, fighting not just against the UN coalition, but also the Chinese Politburo. He challenged them to come and see how his soldiers were slaughtered by superior weapons. After

the war, he became Defence Minister. During the Great Leap Forward, he found himself at odds with Mao and was deposed in 1959. Peng was also a victim of the Cultural Revolution. He was arrested, tortured and humiliated in front of 40,000 people. He died in prison in 1974, his last wish being to see the sun. It wasn't granted.

At the end of the 1970s he was rehabilitated, and was described as "incorruptible and impeccable", a man who felt strongly for his soldiers.

BY PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA



General
Peng
Dehuai.

Ice-cold missions

The winters in Korea were extremely cold. The soldiers at the front had to work in temperatures as low as minus 30 degrees. These photographs reveal how UN troops handled the extreme cold.

Text: HUGO NORDLAND



Marching through the snow

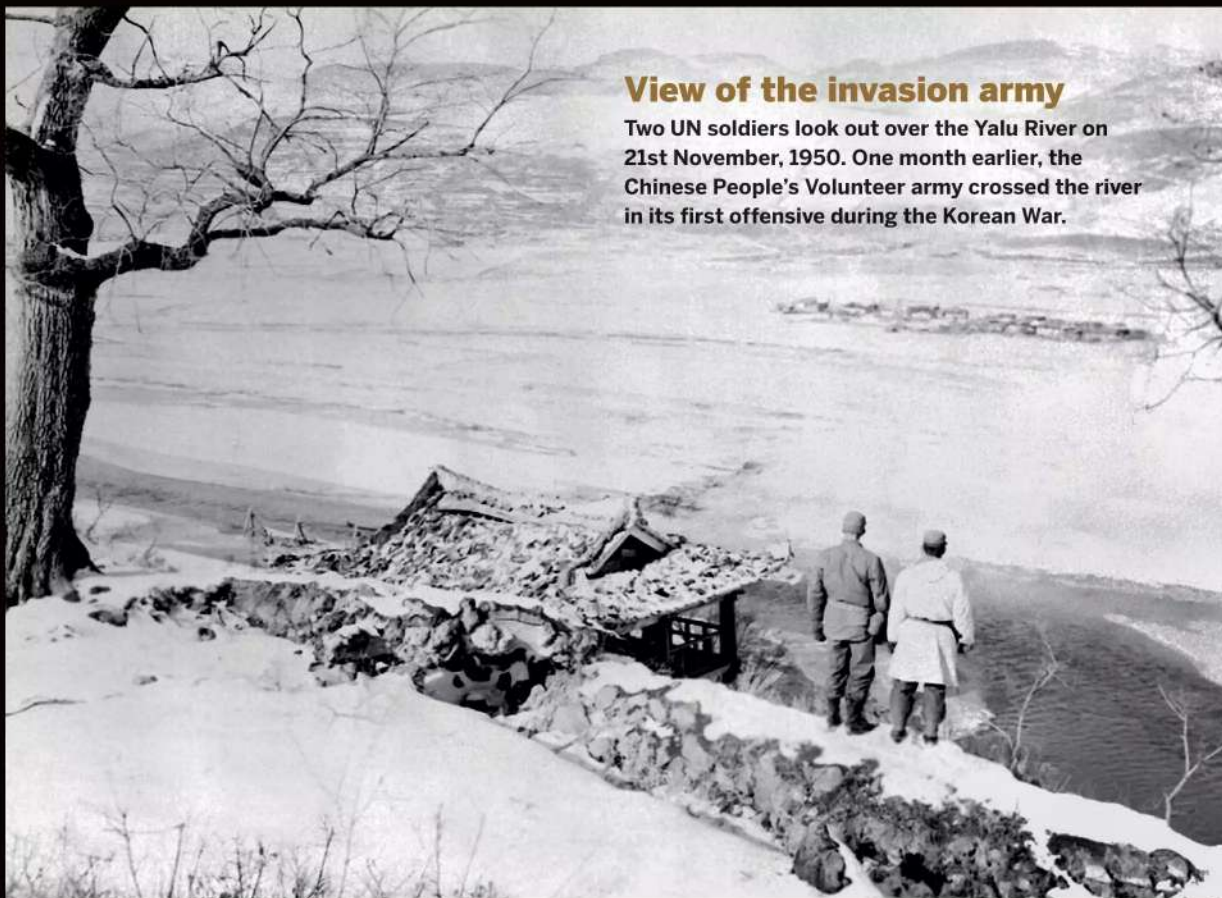
A US marine wades through the snow behind the front by Yudam-ni at the end of November-December 1950.



Protected from the cold

US soldiers in winter kit in very cold weather conditions in Korea. They wore special masks to protect them from extreme cold and altitude.





View of the invasion army

Two UN soldiers look out over the Yalu River on 21st November, 1950. One month earlier, the Chinese People's Volunteer army crossed the river in its first offensive during the Korean War.



Snow surrounds tank

An US Marine sweeps snow from the tower of a M46 Patton tank on 9th December, 1952 after the first snows had fallen. Tanks had to be carefully maintained in cold weather so that they didn't freeze.



Postie on a donkey

MPS soldier Edward J Chandler rides on Francis with mail that must be delivered regardless of the weather.

A black and white photograph showing a group of Marines in a snowy, wooded area. They are wearing heavy winter gear, including helmets and parkas. Some are sitting on the ground, while others are standing in the background. The scene is filled with snow, and the trees are bare. The overall mood is one of resilience and camaraderie in harsh conditions.

In good spirits

Tough and frozen marines take a break in the snow. Despite the stresses of marching in the cold weather, several of them smile for the camera.

BETTMANN/GETTY

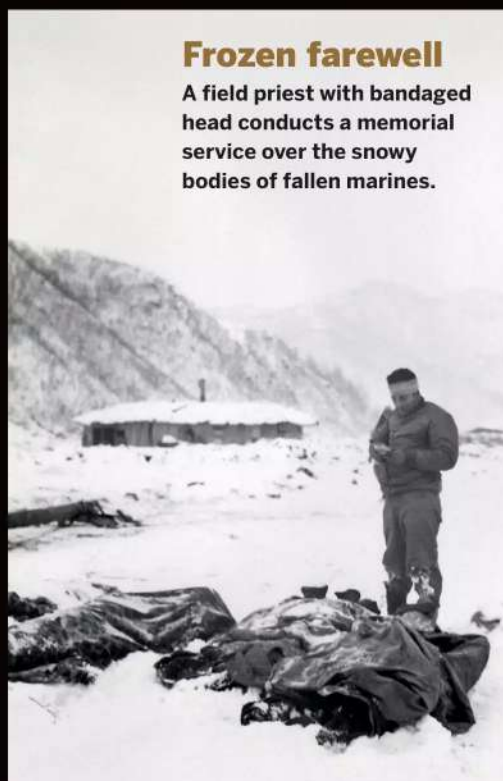
THE WAR IN PICTURES



EVERETT/IBL

Waiting for evacuation

US Marines with frost bite wait for transport by helicopter at Chosin Reservoir where they had fought Chinese forces for five days and nights.



EVERETT/IBL

Frozen farewell

A field priest with bandaged head conducts a memorial service over the snowy bodies of fallen Marines.



ARCHIVE IMAGE / ALAMY/IBL

Warm-up before departure

The engines of some Sherman tanks from the 1st Marine Division were heated. Other tanks had to be warmed every 30 minutes so they didn't freeze.



EVERETT/BL

▲ **Safe retreat**

US Marines march south from Kotori. The hills above the road had recently been cleared of Chinese soldiers to enable a safe retreat through the snowy mountain landscape. The picture was taken around 10th December, 1950.

Tents in snowdrifts ▶

Snow-capped tents at the marine base at Kotori, south of the Chosin Reservoir. The picture was taken some time between 6th-15th December, 1950.



EVERETT/BL

The 5th and 7th Marine Regiments withdraw along the icy roads from besieged Yudam-Ni to Hagaru. During the five-day retreat, they were under constant attack from the Chinese.

General MacArthur

THE WAR HERO WHO GOT FIRED

In autumn 1950, Douglas MacArthur is a living legend. During World War II, he broke the Japanese Army and now is ready to conquer communist North Korea. There are only two obstacles in his way: 300,000 Chinese soldiers and his own failing judgement.

Text: **BY MARTIN LANDIN & ESSEN MØNSTER-KJÆR**



MacArthur promised victory before Christmas but delivered a heavy defeat instead. Worse, he blamed everyone else for his mistakes.

GETTY/ALL OVER

CARL MYDANS/TIME LIFE PICTURES/GETTY

**"WE SHALL LAND AT
INCHON, AND I SHALL
CRUSH THEM"**

MACARTHUR'S FALL

MacArthur with his characteristic pilot-style sunglasses and corn cob pipe.

The soldiers of the 8th Cavalry Regiment had heard rumours: the US men told one another how a South Korean division had been overrun and massacred by the Chinese. It had happened a less than a week ago, they said.

It was 1st November, 1950. US and South Korean soldiers, along with units from several other countries, advanced as quickly as they could through the snowy mountain landscapes of North Korea. General Douglas 'Mac' MacArthur, the head of the vast UN force, had ordered his men forward at full speed, north up to the Yalu River, which marked the border with China.

The goal was to overthrow the communists and reunite Korea. MacArthur had promised victory before Christmas, and it seemed to be a realistic claim: the defeated North Korean army no longer offered any real opposition. Now the cold and the snow were the worst enemies. And so, despite the frost, the soldiers in the 8th Cavalry were optimistic when they stopped to rest outside the city of Unsan.

Suddenly, the silence was broken by crisp notes sounding from the mountainside. For a moment, one of the men thought they heard bagpipes, but the



President Truman meets the medal-strewn General MacArthur in October 1950.

noise was bugles sounding an attack. Seconds later, shadows appeared in the dark. Three battalions of Chinese simultaneously raced into and through the US positions. There was no resistance, only mayhem, panic and death. A few units further back attempted to create a new line, but they too were overrun by the advancing Chinese.

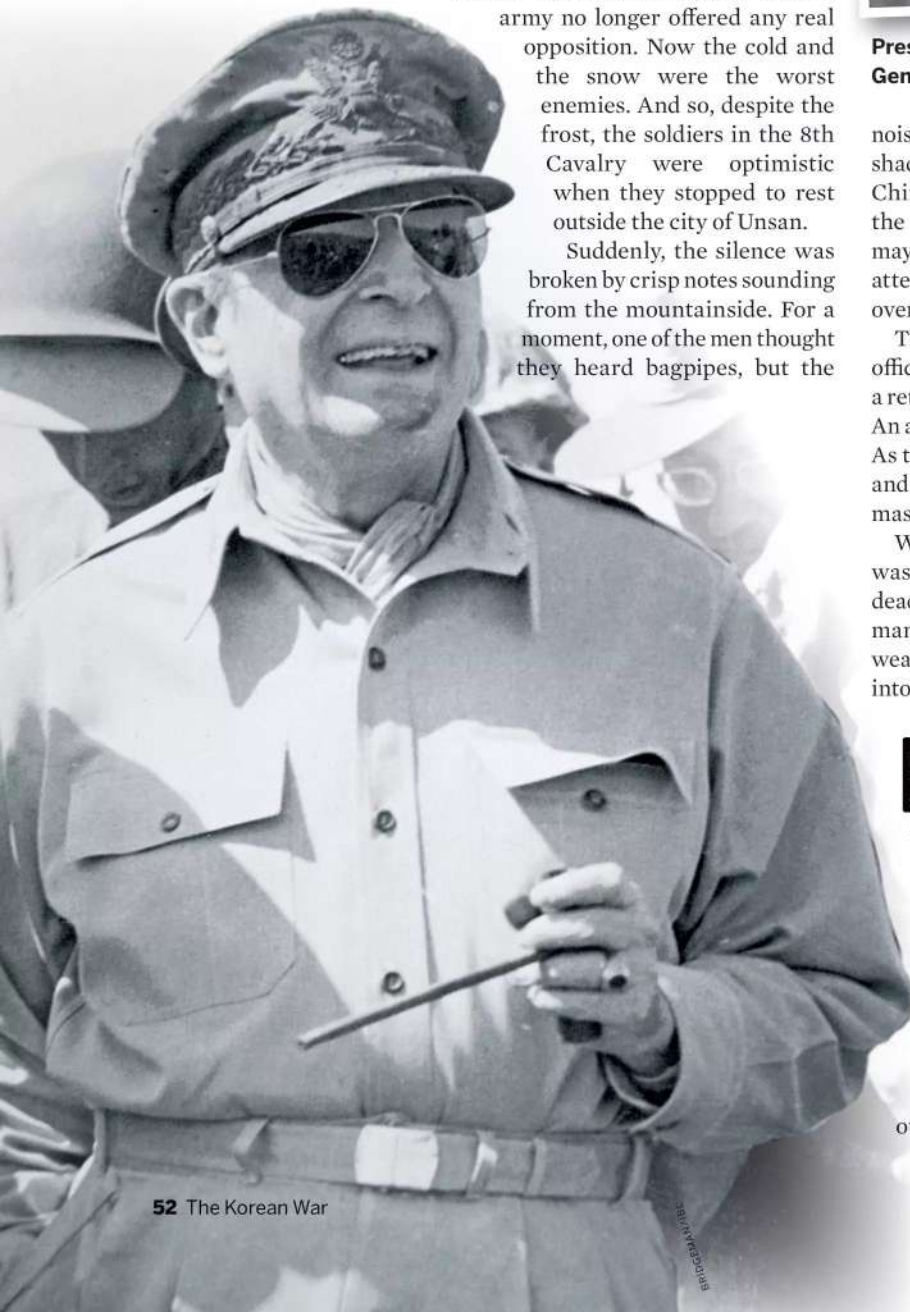
There was no alternative: they had to flee. A US officer set up a convoy with ten trucks and ordered a retreat. But that was what the Chinese expected. An ambush awaited the men further along the road. As the trucks appeared, machine guns opened fire and bullets whipped through the vehicles. It was a massacre and almost no one survived.

When the sun rose, the 8th Cavalry Regiment was no more. Most of the US soldiers were either dead or captured, and while a few isolated groups managed to escape, they were on foot and without weapons. After the attack, the Chinese disappeared into the mountains where no vehicles could follow.

Perhaps the assault at Unsan should have been a warning to MacArthur to cancel his advance, but that's not how he interpreted the situation.

The Korean War was as good as won, the general claimed from his Tokyo headquarters, 400 kilometres away. A few Chinese units had intervened in the conflict, but that didn't count for much in his mind. He was determined that the offensive should continue. His soldiers would pay a heavy price for his arrogance.

The war hero, MacArthur, was used to telling other people what was important. During his



“THE WAR HERO, MACARTHUR, WAS USED TO TELLING OTHER PEOPLE WHAT WAS IMPORTANT”

career, he had received over one hundred medals. Back home in the US, people loved the bold but egotistical general; for many years, children, streets and parks had been named after him.

The Republican Party had plans to nominate MacArthur as its presidential candidate in 1944 and also in 1948, and the general was eager to take the job. The White House would be just the right place to end his career, but first, he had some unfinished business to take care of: the Korean War.

The conflict began on 25th June, 1950, when 200,000 North Koreans unexpectedly crossed the border into South Korea. It was the communist regime's intention to use force to reunite the divided country. The UN entered the conflict to defend South Korea, and 70-year-old MacArthur was placed in command of the forces fielded by participating nations.

The general initially struggled to stop the North Koreans from taking all of South Korea. After only a month, both armies were fighting to secure the tip, at the south coast of the island, which by then was all that remained of 'free' South Korea. Then MacArthur hit back.

The general had decided to land troops at the port city of Inchon (modern-day Incheon), far behind enemy lines. Nobody in Washington thought the invasion would succeed, but MacArthur insisted.

“We're going to land at Inchon, and I'm going to crush them!” he declared with his usual arrogance, and no-one dared to contradict him. The operation started on 15th September and was the general's biggest success of the war.

US forces landed with minimal losses. MacArthur's move outflanked the entire North Korean army and threatened to cut it off deep inside South Korea. The enemy had no choice and retreated home in disarray.

As the general waited for the tributes to pour in, he decided to visit the front to inspect six T-34 tanks that US troops had managed to capture. Suddenly, a spray of bullets whipped past him, but MacArthur calmly stood his ground before dryly remarking to the reporters he'd brought with him that the North Korean marksmen were very poorly trained.

12 days after the landing at Inchon, he had retaken most of South Korea. The sudden reversal in fortune surprised army chiefs and the president back in Washington. They had not planned the ▶



FATHER

Arthur MacArthur was a genius, and he insisted that others recognise it.

SON

Like his father, Douglas MacArthur had great talent and loved showing off.



MacArthur family – a dynasty of strategists

♦ Douglas MacArthur was born to be a leader. It was in the family. That's what he was taught by his father, Arthur MacArthur, a self-assured lieutenant general and war hero.

The MacArthur men didn't take orders from anyone. Arthur was Douglas' role model. A veteran of the American Civil War, he became colonel at just 19 years old, and went on to have a stellar career that fulfilled his early promise. It wasn't enough for Arthur, though. He believed he deserved more. When he died in 1912 at the age of 67, he was a bitter man, angry with both the army and the political elite.

The general's aide Colonel Enoch Crowder described Arthur MacArthur as “the most flamboyantly

egotistical man I had ever seen, until I met his son”.

Douglas MacArthur surpassed his father both in talent and self-esteem. He received outstanding marks at the officer's academy at West Point, and during World War I, at the age of 38, he became the youngest divisional commander at the front and then the army's youngest ever chief of staff.

In World War II, Douglas MacArthur was one of the US's foremost generals, but he was also one of its biggest troublemakers.

It was widely known that he detested President Franklin D Roosevelt, and he did not tolerate anyone who interfered with his plans or decisions. No-one dared to put him in his place, though: ‘Mac’ delivered results, and the people loved him.

MACARTHUR'S FALL



EVERETT/IBL

MacArthur wrapped up in a jeep on a freezing day in Korea. The general always left the front in good time so he could spend the night at his comfortable headquarters in Japan.

► next step in the campaign. But MacArthur had no doubts: he planned to continue across the border and wipe the name of North Korea from the map.

After the triumph of Inchon it was difficult to contradict him and although President Truman privately doubted that the general could achieve his objective, he gave him a clear signal to continue.

Before MacArthur started the advance, he divided his forces into two parts. General Walton 'Bulldog' Walker, who had commanded armoured divisions during World War II, had until then been leading the ground forces in Korea. Now he was forced to give half of them to General Edward Mallory 'Ned' Almond, one of MacArthur's 'yes' men. Thus, the UN army no longer had any commander at the front: MacArthur was attempting to control everything from Japan, far from the action.

The army chiefs back in the US shook their heads in disbelief: the split was against all military logic. Those generals who might have intervened, however, were afraid of MacArthur.

“WHILE THE UN FORCES ROLLED INTO NORTH KOREA IN OCTOBER 1950, THE GENERAL HELD COURT IN JAPAN”

Most of them had risen through the ranks during World War II, but Mac had been there, unassailable at the top, throughout their ascent. And so, MacArthur did as he pleased.

While the UN forces rolled into North Korea in October 1950, the general held court in Japan. His headquarters in Tokyo were swamped with admiring journalists who reported on the big chief's activities. The officers on his staff were toadies: their main task was to confirm his image of reality.

General Charles Willoughby, MacArthur's lamentably poor intelligence chief, was among the sycophants who were keen to keep the ageing general happy in his delusions. He immediately sprang into action when he received reports from the CIA that around 300,000 Chinese troops were gathering at the Yalu River on the border with North Korea. Instead of informing MacArthur of the findings, Willoughby downplayed the threat, allowing the general to continue with his assertion that China wouldn't dare stand in the way of the US Army. After all, MacArthur reasoned, the US had nuclear weapons, China did not. Victory would be theirs by Christmas.

Trumen summoned MacArthur to a conference on Wake Island, a small atoll in the Pacific Ocean on 15th October, 1950. There were a ►

Victory turned to defeat

MacArthur took the initiative in the Korean War with an ingenious landing behind enemy forces, but his hopes for complete victory ended in a disaster.

5 Chinese strike everywhere:

the Chinese troops in Korea start a major offensive on 25th November. The attack comes as a total surprise to MacArthur and the US suffers huge losses.

Chinese People's Liberation Army
Peng Dehuai

4 China sends a warning:

China positions its forces to stop the US advance. Chairman Mao orders 300,000 men of the PLA across the border into Korea. On 1st November, they attack a US regiment outside Unsan. In the absence of further attacks, MacArthur dismisses the incident as a one-off.

A. The Chinese slip between 8th Cavalry units.

C. The UN's escape route is blocked by Chinese troops.

B. The US force tries to retreat.

D. US soldiers flee on foot in small groups.

3 The 38th parallel:

MacArthur's troops cross into North Korea on 30th September without encountering any notable resistance. His aim is to force out the leaders of the communist regime and unite the Korean Peninsula.

2 Landing behind enemy:

US 10th Corps lands at Inchon on 15th September. MacArthur's move forces North Korea's army to flee South Korea. The US Eighth Army pursue their retreating foe.

1 Death match:

North Korea has occupied its neighbour after a surprise attack in June 1950. At Pusan, US and South Korean forces hold a small bridgehead despite constant attacks by North Korea's well-trained army. The battle is ongoing throughout August and September.

6 2nd Division falls into trap:

MacArthur's army is falling back rapidly. At nightfall on the 30th November, the 2nd Division prepares to retreat from its base at Kunu-ri. It tries to race south through a narrow pass in the mountains, but Chinese troops are hiding above them. The deadly fire from howitzers and machine guns halves the division's number in just a few hours.

A. Several Chinese divisions threaten the city of Kunu-ri from the north.

B. US 2nd Division initiates a retreat south.

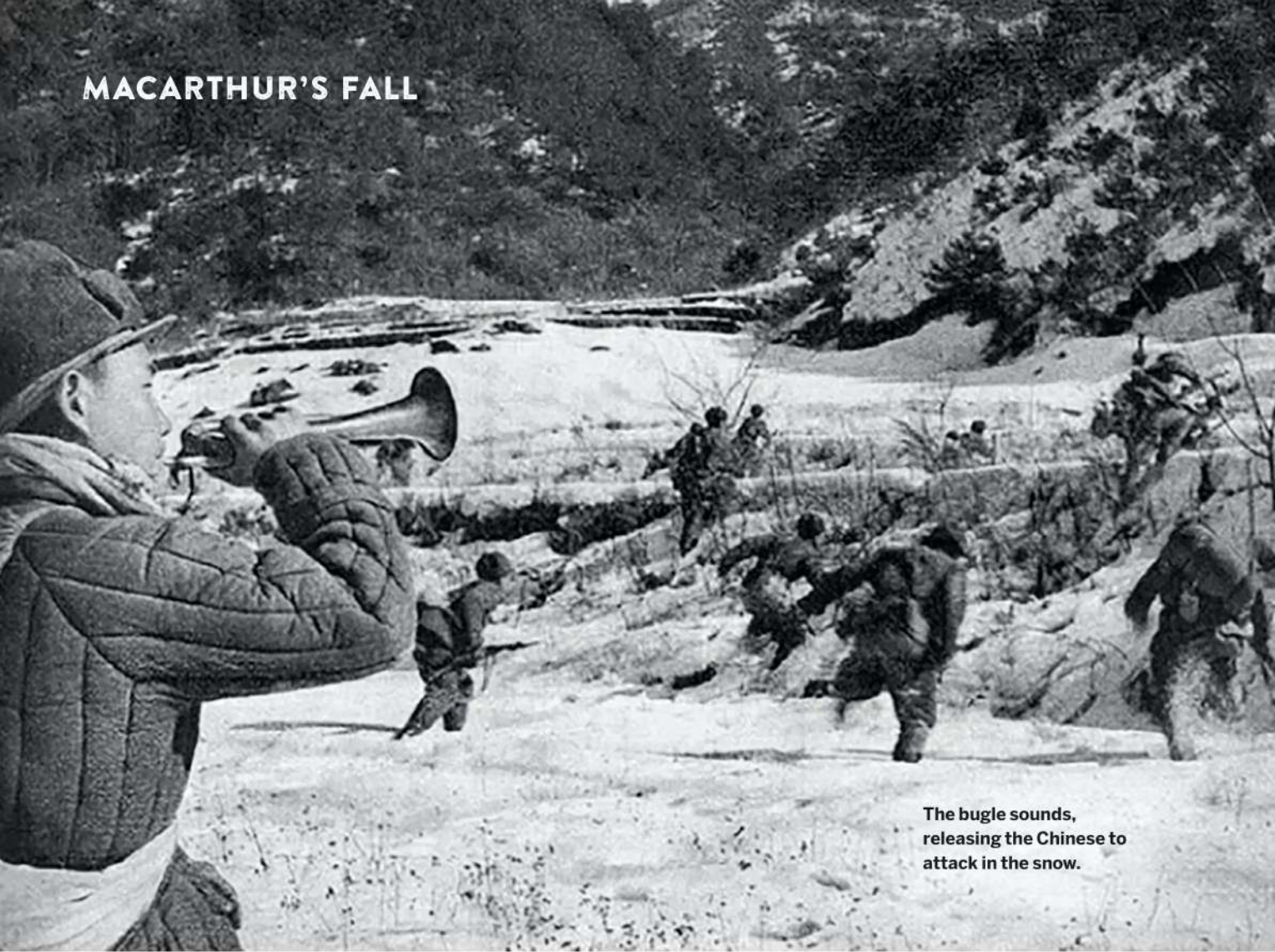
C. China's 113th Division lies in wait on the mountainside along the road.

D. The flight becomes deadly when the Chinese open fire with howitzer and machine guns.

7 The US's long flight:

after 19 miles, MacArthur's army crosses back over the 38th parallel. The retreat continues and does not end until the troops are deep inside South Korea, where they create a new front line. When the war finally ends in 1953, Korea is permanently divided.

MACARTHUR'S FALL



The bugle sounds, releasing the Chinese to attack in the snow.

► number of items on the agenda, but the real reason for the meeting was to discuss the possibility of China intervening in Korea.

The general showed his contempt for Truman from the first moment. Instead of saluting, he stretched out his hand to the president as though they were equals. Truman chose to ignore this insult and instead got down to the business at hand. In a private meeting, overheard and documented by Vernice Anderson, Truman asked MacArthur what the chances were of Chinese or Soviet intervention.

"Very little," MacArthur replied, before adding that the Chinese could only have managed to get 50,000 to 60,000 men over the Yalu River. "They have no air force. Now that we have bases for our air force in Korea, if the Chinese try to get down to

Pyongyang, it would be the greatest slaughter in the history of mankind."

Truman and his staff were delighted by the general's confident statements and didn't push for more details. They never discussed what MacArthur should do if the Chinese did come after all.

From his headquarters in Tokyo, MacArthur ordered both his commanders in Korea to "drive forward with full speed and with the full utilisation of all their force". He was sure that the last stretch to the Yalu River was simply a question of mopping up.

On 19th October, under the cover of darkness, the first Chinese soldiers slipped across the Yalu undetected by US planes.

On 1st November, the Chinese massacred the 8th Cavalry Regiment, but then disappeared again. There were no more attacks.

"JUST UNDER TWO WEEKS LATER, THE CHINESE MASSACRED THE 8TH CAVALRY REGIMENT"

In the weeks that followed, the UN troops captured a number of Chinese soldiers who all told the same tale: that a large force of Chinese troops was hiding in the mountains of Korea. The reports never made it past Willoughby's desk,

though. He knew he wouldn't advance his career prospects by telling the general about an army of ghosts hidden in the mountain tops.

Instead, Willoughby confirmed what MacArthur was already convinced of: there was no threat from China. On 6th November, the general issued a communiqué stating that the final victory was close. And still, MacArthur received no warnings.

It was almost midnight on 25th November when the big Chinese offensive began. All along the front with North Korea – not to mention behind it – UN forces were exposed to wave upon wave of attacks.

The day before, Willoughby had said that up to 71,000 Chinese troops might have crossed into Korea. The correct figure was around 300,000. Stealing through the darkness, they left their hideouts and stormed the enemy's positions.

Outmanoeuvred troops sent out distress calls. Captain Alan Jones of the 9th Regiment was at headquarters when the attack hit and heard the reports coming in from the regiment's three battalions: "They're everywhere... Every time we stop them, there's more... We can no longer hold; they are so many... This may be the last message you get from us."

Some soldiers did not even have time to get out of their sleeping bags before they were stabbed to death by Chinese bayonets. Only a few officers were capable of performing their duty. One of them was Lieutenant Gene Takahashi.

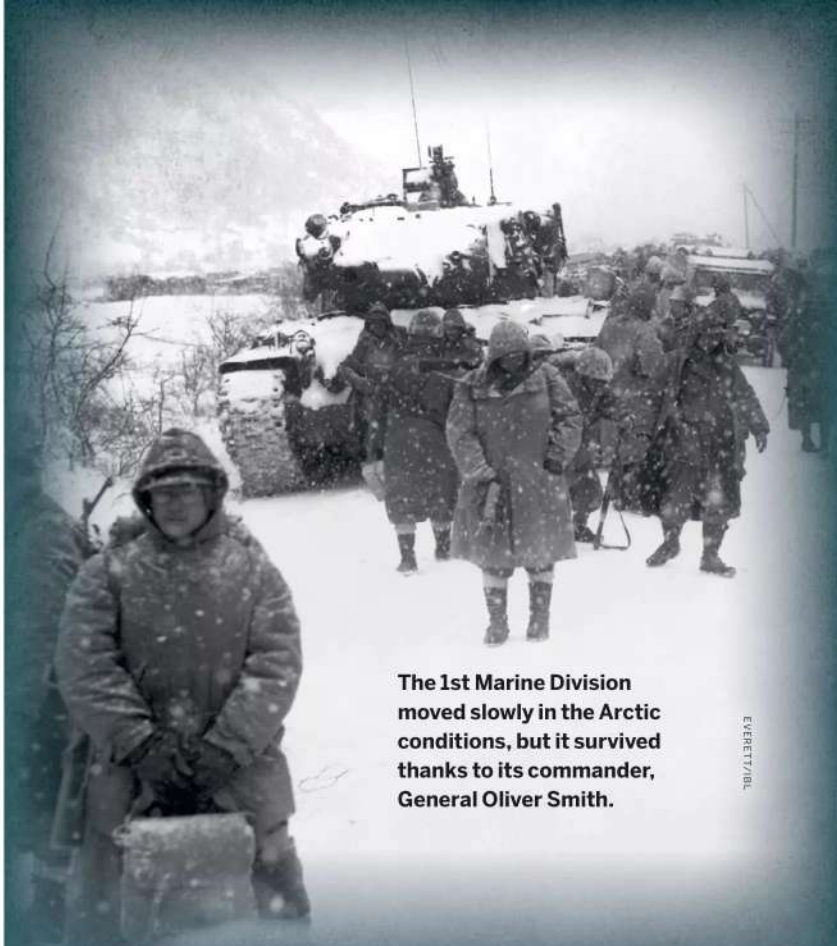
"Retreat!" he cried as he ran through the inferno. "Hold together! Stay close to me!"

Takahashi's troop was largely destroyed, but those that remained followed him. Men from other platoons joined the group. Takahashi led them back and up into the mountains. They remained there for as long as they could, but the Chinese caught them, taking Takahashi and a few others captive.

Many of the other officers panicked, focussing only on saving themselves. Units were split and the survivors fled south. What should have been the last few miles of a triumphal march had, in just a few hours, turned into one of the most embarrassing defeats in US military history.

As UN troops fled south, MacArthur's staff officers tried to stop them. A retreat would crush the general's dream of a final victory and a well-deserved sojourn in the White House.

MacArthur refused to take responsibility for the disaster. As Max Hastings puts it in his book *The Korean War*, the general "castigated 'ignorant' correspondents for their inability to distinguish between a planned withdrawal and 'full flight'". At the same time, he asked for permission to bomb targets on the Chinese side of the border. For once, the answer was no. The president was afraid that ►



The 1st Marine Division moved slowly in the Arctic conditions, but it survived thanks to its commander, General Oliver Smith.

EVERETT/OL

Defied MacArthur and rescued the division

► One US general failed to implement MacArthur's orders in Korea. As a result, his division was ready when the Chinese attacked.

General Oliver Smith became the subject of a rare success story towards the end of 1950 when everything else went sour for the US. As commander of the 1st Marine Division, he managed to extricate his men from the death trap into which MacArthur had placed them.

All autumn, MacArthur had ordered his troops to advance with pace and with as wide a front as possible. He wanted US troops to capture as much of North Korea as they could.

Smith thought this was crazy: if the enemy countered, US forces would be scattered over

such a wide area that they could not possibly defend themselves. And so, he defied MacArthur's orders and instead kept his troops together and probed forward gently.

When the Chinese attacked in strength on 25th November, 1950, the 1st Marine Division was isolated at the Chosin Reservoir in the far north of Korea. The marines didn't panic. Smith held off the first Chinese attack and then led his men in an orderly retreat.

The unit fell back 15 kilometres in five days, fighting every step of the way. By the time they reached the safety of the coast, the division had lost just 3,500 men from a total of 25,500. No other US unit had coped so well.

MACARTHUR'S FALL

“SELDOM HAS A MORE UNPOPULAR MAN FIRED A MORE POPULAR ONE”

- ▶ the war would escalate. The Chinese may not have had nuclear weapons, but they had their communist brothers in the Soviet Union.

Over the following days, MacArthur suffered violent mood swings: one moment he talked about surrendering and evacuating the entire UN force from Korea, the next, he demanded nuclear weapons in order to obliterate his enemy. In the press, he criticised Washington, claiming the administration there had betrayed him and his soldiers.

While the staff in his Tokyo headquarters fought to save his reputation, the soldiers in Korea fought for their lives. For the 8th Regiment, which had already been ravaged by the Chinese on 25th November, an even worse nightmare was in store.

The regiment was part of the 2nd US Infantry Division, which formed the backbone of the entire UN force. Chinese shells were already raining down over the headquarters of the division's commanding officer, General Laurence 'Dutch' Keiser, when he ordered his troops to withdraw.

The road south was narrow and it was surrounded by hills on both sides. The terrain was perfect for a Chinese ambush, but it was the fastest escape route, and therefore Keiser did not hesitate. On the night of 30th November, he started his retreat.

Five tanks took the lead to clear away any obstacles. The rest followed in a long column: jeeps

When he came home, MacArthur was hailed as a hero with a big parade in New York.



When the president fired MacArthur, his popularity dropped to the lowest seen by any president in the history of the Gallup poll.

with officers, several tanks with infantry riders sitting on top, trucks full of weapons, ammunition and personnel, and finally the engineering troops. After less than a kilometre, the Chinese opened fire.

The five tanks received orders to advance at full speed. Their engines roared, and they began to plough through the obstacles in their path. The rest of the convoy had trouble keeping up with them, though. The unprotected jeeps and trucks were destroyed by grenades and bullets, and others were forced to stop to pick up their comrades.

A narrow pass lay a few kilometres further on, an almost 500-metre-long ravine that was so narrow that vehicles could not pass one another. If a tank broke down there, the entire 2nd Division would be stuck. The vanguard quickly cleared the road of burned-out vehicles – the remnants of a Turkish UN brigade that had been attacked there a day earlier.

Then the five tanks continued into the pass. The Chinese seemed to have left the hills around the road and the tanks made it through without being attacked. The enemy was waiting for the main force, though. When the rest of the 2nd Division started to follow the tanks, the Chinese opened fire from hidden positions and the slaughter began again.

Caught between the steep slopes, the US troops were easy pickings. Corpses piled up on the road, and the men in the vehicles behind were forced to drive over them. When Keiser arrived at the pass, his division was almost broken. Only a few returned

RETMANN/CORBIS/GETTY

GETTY IMAGES



BETTMANN/GETTY

the Chinese fire, and none of the officers were leading their men. Keiser survived the bloodbath, but of the 11,000 men who entered the pass, only 5,300 escaped.

By Christmas 1950, UN forces had been forced back to the 38th parallel. On 24th December, MacArthur sent his wish list to Washington: 34 targets in China that he wanted to wipe out with nuclear weapons. He would rather trigger World War III than acknowledge his own lack of judgement.

Truman had banned MacArthur from talking to journalists, but it didn't stop him holding several press conferences in the following months. By 11th April, 1951, Truman finally fired MacArthur for refusing to accept his presidential authority.

The dismissal came as a shock to both the press and the US public. *Time* magazine summed up the mood of the nation: "Seldom has a more unpopular man fired a more popular one." Right-wing senators demanded that Truman be arrested and proposed MacArthur as presidential

candidate for the election in 1952. Millions of people went onto the streets to honour the fallen warrior.

Shortly afterwards, a joint senate committee was established to investigate the reason for MacArthur's dismissal, and as the details came out, the general's star began to fall.

Ten years later, at 82 years of age, in 1962, he gave his last speech. "The shadows are getting longer. Twilight is approaching", he remarked grandiosely.

Two years later MacArthur died of liver failure. President Lyndon B Johnson gave him a state funeral. Korea was forgotten, as were the soldiers he had forced to move forward to defeat. 🇺🇸

MacArthur gives his farewell speech on 19th April, 1951.

Martin Landin and Esben Mønster-Kjær are military history writers.

Further reading: *The Coldest Winter* (2007) by David Halberstam • *The Korean War* (1987) by Max Hastings • *Douglas MacArthur's Reminiscences* (1965) by Douglas MacArthur.

THE WAR IN PICTURES

Angels of mercy in the field

The staff of the Mobile Army Surgical Hospitals (MASH) saved many lives during the Korean War. At these mobile field hospitals, wounded soldiers could quickly get first aid before being transported to a larger hospital.

Text: HUGO NORDLAND



20TH CENTURY/EVERETT COLLECTION/BL

Reality was like the TV series

*M*A*S*H*, which was a TV series about a field hospital during the Korean War, ran for 11 seasons between 1972-83. In the picture we see Alan Alda, one of the main actors.



Medical corps at the front

A wounded American soldier arrives at a MASH unit in a truck, where staff quickly lift him into one of the hospital tents. MASH's aim was to allow experienced doctors and nurses work closer to the front in an orderly setting.





Quickly on, quickly off

Medical corps personnel lift a soldier from a rescue helicopter. A stretcher could be attached to either side of the helicopter for fast loading and unloading.

Base behind the front

A US MASH hospital: the units were located close to the front so staff could quickly receive the wounded and stabilise their condition.



Helicopter coped with terrain

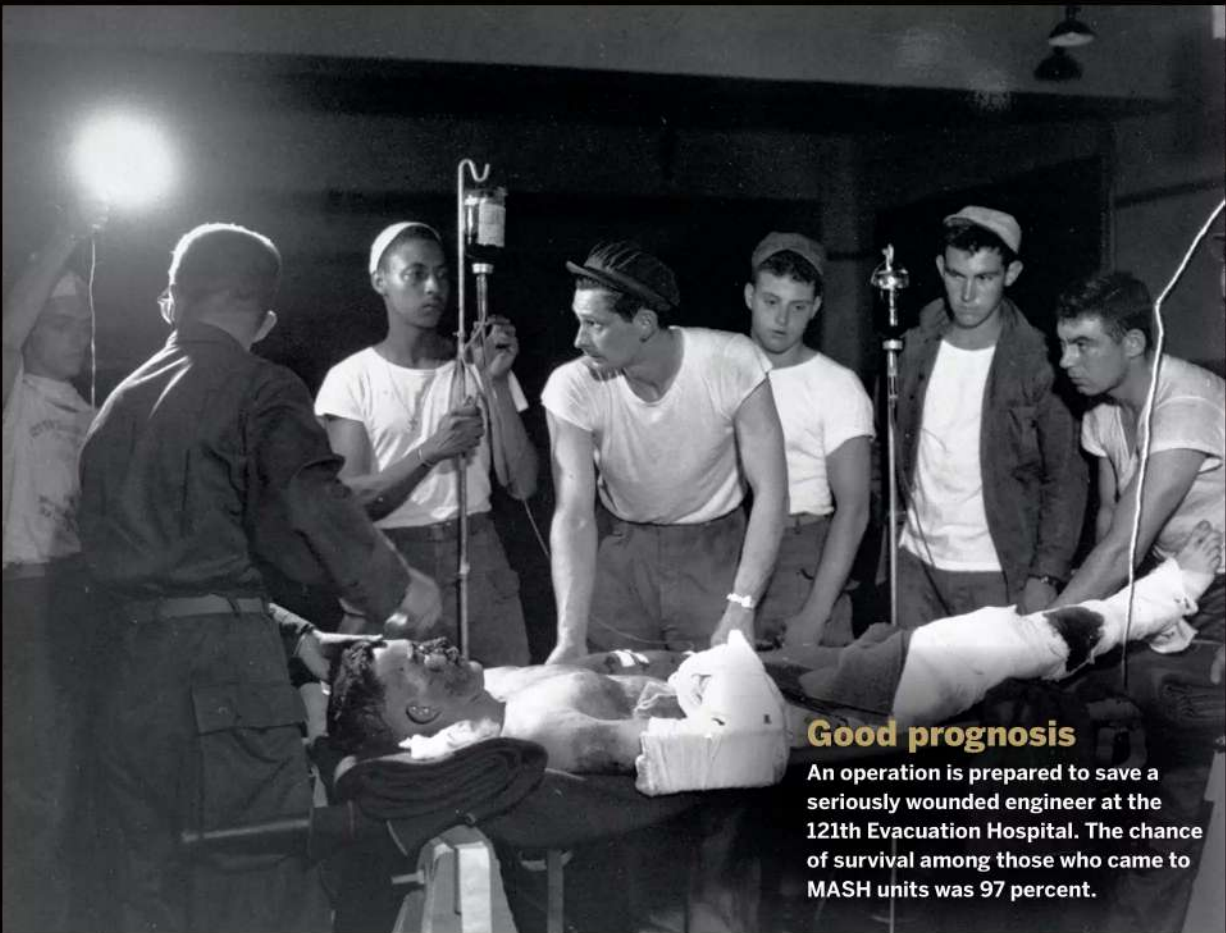
Bell 47 Sioux helicopters were important for the MASH unit's work. They could reach and carry the wounded from the front to the hospital in a few minutes – even when the terrain was rough.



Coloured codes determined soldiers' fate

A wounded soldier is taken to a MASH hospital. When he arrives, he's given a colour code based on his injuries:

green (minor injury), yellow (needs attention, not critical), red (life-threatening injury), black (a hopeless case).



Good prognosis

An operation is prepared to save a seriously wounded engineer at the 121st Evacuation Hospital. The chance of survival among those who came to MASH units was 97 percent.

THE WAR IN PICTURES



Between life and death

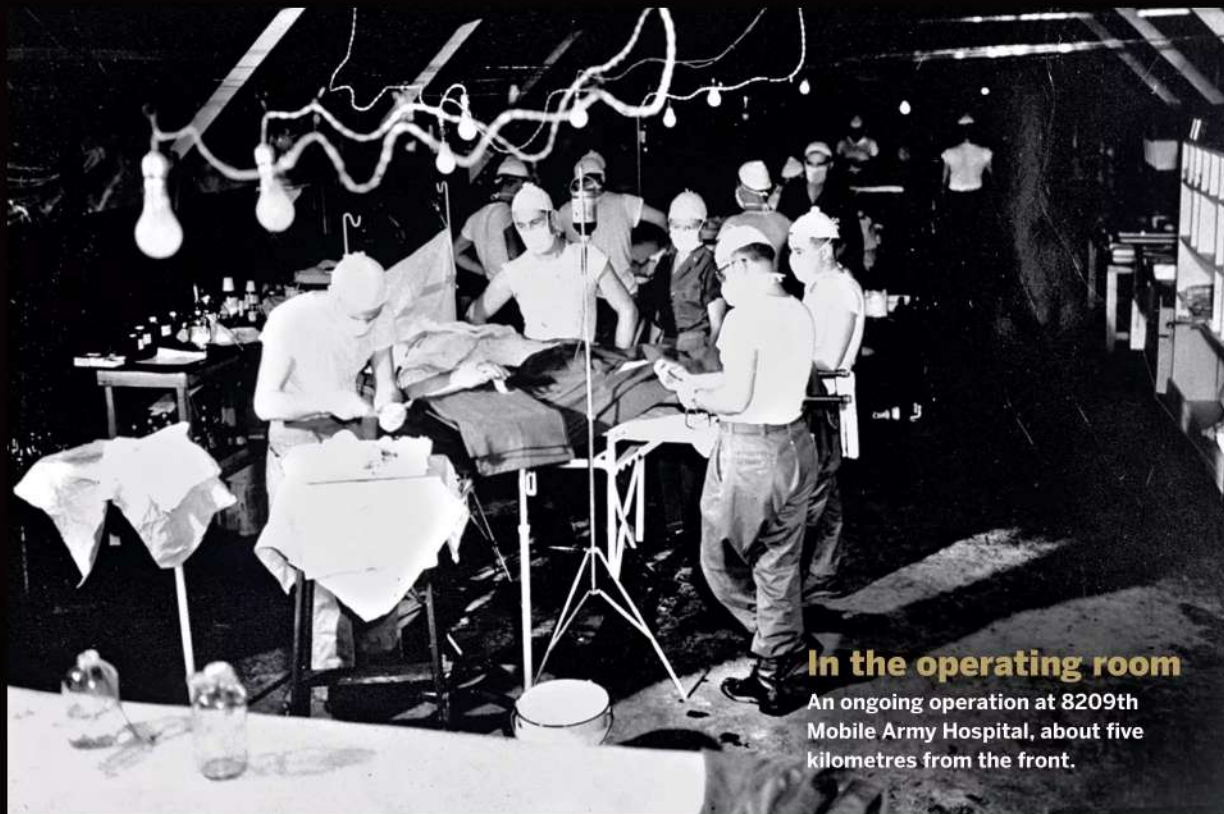
A doctor at the 1st MASH, X Corps operates on a soldier who has received life-threatening injuries in combat.

Wounded come from the skies

Doctors treat the wounded and spot something in the sky; probably a helicopter on its way to the unit.



TRANSCENDENTAL GRAPHICS/GETTY



In the operating room

An ongoing operation at 8209th Mobile Army Hospital, about five kilometres from the front.

FELDMAN/US ARMY/THE LIFE PICTURE COLLECTION/GETTY



Lifting the marines

US Marines injured during the Battle of the Karin San Mountains are loaded into a Sikorsky HO3S-1 Marine helicopter before evacuation to the nearest MASH unit. 23rd May, 1951.

USNAVALA/AV/IBL



GENVIEW NAVJO/COMBIS/ALTY

Inspection before surgery

A nurse checks a wounded soldier on a stretcher and assesses his condition before deciding whether or not to send him to surgery.



EVERETT/BL

Cargo is secured

A soldier from the 21st Infantry Regiment is strapped to a stretcher, which is then attached to a rescue helicopter for transport. 3rd April, 1951.

Pork Chop Hill

BATTLES IN THE NIGHT

Text:
ARTUR SZULC

Scene from the movie *Pork Chop Hill* from 1959. The action focuses on the battle for the hill in April 1953.

EVERETT/IBL

While negotiations for a ceasefire dragged on, there was an intense hunt for symbolic victories. The bloody trench warfare at Pork Chop Hill in July 1953 had no strategic importance.

Lieutenant Dick Shea and his soldiers who defended part of the trench line up on Pork Chop Hill had endured a tough night. The Chinese had exposed the hillside to an intense artillery bombardment and launched several infantry assaults. Early in the morning of 7th July, 1953, Shea was sat in his trench when Chinese

soldiers suddenly appeared from nowhere to attack them. Shea shot and killed several fighters before his bullets ran out and he was forced to pull a knife, which he used to kill another two Chinese. The rest fled. Shea gathered his men and went on the counterattack in the trench line. The enemy was pushed back, but only for a while. The battle for the hill would continue for a few days. ▶

The battle's objective
— Pork Chop Hill.



PORK CHOP HILL

A M-46 Patton tank reinforces the American lines on top of Pork Chop Hill.

WARFAREHISTORY.NET/WORK



- The final two years of the Korean War lay in stark contrast to the first, which was characterised by mobile warfare with wavering major offensives on either side. From the summer of 1951 until the ceasefire was signed in 1953, however, the front more or less became a fixed line just north of Seoul, crossing the Korean Peninsula just north of the 38th parallel in very hilly terrain.

Initially, the stabilisation of the front was because the three superpowers – the Soviet Union, China and United States – pressured their respective Korean partners to open negotiations on an armistice. In Moscow and Washington in particular, leaders had become increasingly convinced that it was pointless to continue supporting a costly war that had the potential to escalate into a global conflict. But the conversation that began between the rival nations in the summer of 1951 stalled, because both northern and southern sides were reluctant to reach an agreement.

EVENTUALLY THE TROOPS had dug down to create an advanced 'battle line' while retaining stronger forces behind the fortified front line, where

the main positions were established on several hills providing a better overview of the surrounding terrain. This transition to stagnant defensive lines led to warfare of a character that was reminiscent of the situation on the Western Front during World War I.

Both sides built bunkers, dug trenches and tunnels, and set up barbed wire and minefields. Another defensive tactic was to place barrels with napalm or white phosphorous. Wires were then drawn from the barrels to the trenches, so when the enemy attacked a hillside position the drums could be ignited and rolled down the hill simply by tugging on the wire.

It wasn't unusual during infantry raids to see an intense light flare in the darkness because most fighting took place at night. Despite the motionless front, nerves became fraught. Higher levels of command attempted to soothe UN troops' nerves through a rotation system as well as frequently switching forward and rear units around.

Occasionally, some troops had the opportunity to leave the battle line every three or four days to spend a few hours in warm shelters behind the

front. However, soldiers often went several months between bouts of actual leave.

On the whole, it was a fairly low-intensive war that occasionally broke into violent battles involving major artillery bombardments and tough fights in or in front of the trenches at the battle line. Most of these fierce and onerous engagements were instigated by communist forces, who worked hard to try and improve their negotiating position during ongoing ceasefire talks. The UN coalition was primarily focused on keeping the position they already controlled.

There was no political or military will among the Americans, who drew the heaviest burden, to take offensive actions that would lead to the loss of men and equipment. In addition, public opinion back in the US began to ask the question why US troops should be engaged in a long-standing civil war in a country far away.

By spring 1953 the internal politics had changed in all three major powers. In January 1953, Dwight D Eisenhower was elected President of the United States, and one of his promises had been to end the war in Korea. Two months later, Joseph Stalin died, which plunged the Soviet Union into an internal crisis that overshadowed its foreign policy enterprise.

IT BECAME IMPORTANT for Moscow to reduce its involvement in conflicts such as Korea since it wasn't interested in entering a major and open conflict with the United States. Nor was Mao able to maintain his enthusiasm for the war, which had been expensive for China. With reduced Soviet support, spending would increase even more, and Mao also claimed that the conflict on the Peninsula pulled his and the Chinese Communist Party's focus away from domestic issues.

Contrary to North or South Korean views, the atmosphere between the great powers was conducive to resuming the ceasefire negotiations. After a six-month break, negotiators returned to Panmunjom's conversation tents in late April 1953. The renewed dialogue was conducted in a positive tone, and yet entailed a significant escalation in fighting on the northern side.

Commanders of the communist forces knew that the politicians would have to quickly sign an agreement, and for that reason they attempted to make a few last forays, even if any captured terrain was militarily meaningless. It was propaganda that drove the attacks – in part, the communists hoped to recapture hills they'd lost the previous year, while also sending a message to the UN coalition that their fighting spirit remained high in the middle of the ongoing talks. One of the most intensive final skirmishes fought at the battle line took place

“IT WAS A FAIRLY LOW-INTENSIVE WAR THAT OCCASIONALLY BROKE INTO VIOLENT BATTLES”

around Hill 255, or – as the Americans dubbed it – Pork Chop Hill.

In the summer of 1952, UN forces took a step forward from their main line and managed to capture a few hills, including Old Baldy (Hill 266) and Pork Chop Hill, in the western and central part of the front. The Chinese were irritated by these losses and tried to recapture them several times without success. General Peng Dehuai, who led the Chinese People's Volunteer Army in Korea, ordered major offensives against the hills. He received approval from senior command, including Mao, and after combining divisions from two armies – the 23rd and 47th – the troops simultaneously attacked three hills in March 1953: Hill 191, Old Baldy and Pork Chop Hill.

OLD BALDY, DEFENDED by a newly arrived and inexperienced Colombian battalion, was taken by a Chinese battalion from the 141st Infantry Division late on 23rd March. The Chinese also managed to take Pork Chop Hill, but this victory was short-lived. After midnight they lost their territory in a counterattack involving units from the US 7th Infantry Division. The result, however, was not entirely beneficial to the US, since the loss of Old Baldy hindered the defence of Pork Chop Hill, which was now left exposed in the defensive line.

After these flurries of action, the pace dropped again, but only because the Chinese forces were preparing for new attacks. Just before midnight on 16th April, round two was initiated on Pork Chop



The hills lie at the border between North and South Korea.



A soldier from the US 7th Infantry Divisions rests beside a captured Chinese light machine gun.

Eyewitness about life on the front line

★ By the time I arrived in Korea both the communist forces and the UN forces had dug in, and the lines had stabilised in what had become a war of the trenches. This was supposed to be a quiet war, just a “police action”, as President Truman called it. For a quiet war, there seemed to be a lot of mortar and artillery shells dropping on us from time to time. On occasions, like when we were at Bunker Hill, the fighting was really tough, and we found ourselves engaged in hand-to-hand combat. We lived in the trenches with the rats, which were some of the largest I had ever seen. Most of the time we spent on guard duty or some work detail. We slept in bunkers made of timbers and sandbags, which were built right in the middle of the trenches. Only our shoes came off when we slept; we kept our clothes on night and day, for weeks at

a time. Bathing consisted of washing with warm water in a helmet liner, except when we were tracked back to the rear for “Little R&R”. On those occasions, about once a month, we could take a shower, get clean clothes and even do a little shopping at the PX.

Like everyone else who served in Korea, I have a lasting memory of the cold. We wore heavy parkas, thermal “Mickey Mouse” boots, and all kinds of other stuff, but I still couldn’t get warm during the winter months. At the same time, I found the summer heat oppressive, mostly because of the high humidity...

One thing never changed – we were always dead tired.

Private First Class Bruce D Lippert, 1st Marine Division.

From Peters, Richard; Li, Xiaobing (ed), *Voices from the Korean War* (2005)

► Hill, which was now defended by two American companies from a 7th Division regiment. After an initial artillery barrage, it emerged that Chinese soldiers had already infiltrated the trenches on top of the hill, which led to hard-fought battles throughout the area.

Groups of riflemen found themselves trapped inside their bunkers because of the enemy’s intense fire combined with their rapid advance. Several US soldiers were killed in their trenches, which were taken over by the Chinese. The attackers’ support groups were constantly fed reinforcements and after midnight the Chinese were in control of almost all Pork Chop Hill.

The task of winning back Pork Chop Hill was given to a reserve company – Company K – that was led by Lieutenant Joseph G Clemons. The attacking force would receive support from other companies in nearby frontal sections. Clemons was ordered to perform the counteroffensive early in the morning of 17th April with his 135 men. As usual, the storming mission was preceded by artillery smashing into the Chinese, who were pushing on towards the US trenches.

At 04.30, Clemons’ troops began to work their way up the hill, spending 29 minutes travelling around 160 metres to the first bunker, despite not being fired on as it was relatively well protected. Sergeant Samuel K Maxwell, a Company-K medic, remembered the trek:

Pork Chop was steep. We were heavily loaded with ammo for our weapons and the MGs [machine guns], as well as the boxes of grenades. The steep climb had us pooped. We got within grenade range in small groups to begin grenading our way down the main trench, clearing out the Chinese.

IT WASN’T LONG before Chinese shells began to rain down over the terrain. At an extremely high cost – half the entire attacking squad – Clemons’ men managed to gain a foothold on the hill. They even discovered surviving soldiers from those who’d fought the first Chinese wave. Support attacks from other troops failed due to the constant barrage from machine guns and artillery. Clemons and his deputy understood their position was untenable in the long run. After the night’s mêlée, the Chinese still had full control over most of the trench lines, and there was only one smaller group from another company that had managed to reach the position where the remains of Clemons’ company had dug in.

Just after 08.00, several reinforcements arrived just as the Chinese launched another attack. American losses rose, and by 15.00 Clemons’ reported: “We must have help or we can’t hold

the hill.” By that point, 18 soldiers had been killed in the fighting along with a further 71 wounded. Altogether there were around 30 soldiers left. They concentrated their defence on a small ridge on the hill and two bunkers.

EVENTUALLY, SENIOR COMMAND officers discussed the importance of the hill and how many men they were willing to sacrifice for an outpost that lacked significance other than giving the northern side a psychological boost before the negotiations about to begin. 7th Division’s commander, Major General Arthur Trudeau, flew in by helicopter to the battle zone to get a better overview of the situation and after talks with Eighth Army staff, decided Hill 255 needed to be kept and fully recaptured. With this aim he inserted another infantry regiment. Companies from the 17th Infantry began working towards the hill late on 17th April.

At the same time, the soldiers trapped on the hill continued to repel Chinese attacks. In some cases, the situation became so critical it required

“SENIOR COMMAND OFFICERS DISCUSSED... HOW MANY MEN THEY WERE WILLING TO SACRIFICE”

US artillery to direct their heavy machine guns on to the roof of the bunkers. It kept the Chinese at bay, but it was only a matter of time before the last US nests would fall. In the end, however, reinforcements arrived into the trench system in the form of three companies. The soldiers, bayonets mounted on their guns, spent the night cleaning out the lines. The Chinese provided some opposition, but retired early in the morning of 18th April. Pork Chop Hill was left in American hands. The second battle for Hill 255 had cost the Americans 104 dead and 373 injured. Enemy losses aren’t known, but were probably very high.

Although the method of attack was very different on both sides, they shared some common features. Attacks never took place during the day, but under ►

Soldiers survived in the gravel and clay trenches, protected from hand grenades and artillery.



PORK CHOP HILL

A wounded US soldier is carried down from Pork Chop Hill by his comrades.

BETTMAN/GETTY IMAGES



- ▶ the cover of night, with artillery used to keep the enemy at bay. Both Chinese and US artillery were important: in two days, nine US artillery battalions fired 115,000 shells.

The battle for Pork Chop Hill generated a lot of attention in the popular media, not least in the United States, where questions were asked over the unnecessary losses. The Chinese found the setback hard to accept, and as negotiations in Panmunjom approached their conclusion, they decided to make one last attempt to capture the hill.

Rested divisions were drafted in, and on the evening of 6th July, Chinese infantry swarmed towards the enemy trenches on the hill. Angelo Palermo, part of a company from the 17th Infantry Division, remembers the Chinese storm:

I could have sworn all of China was on that slope. With enough firepower we could have killed a thousand... but we hadn't nearly enough ammunition to turn back this kind of attack. We fired the .50 [M2 Browning machine gun] until we ran out of ammo,

and by that time the Chinese were in our trench line, so we fought them with rifle butts, bayonets, and even fists and helmets.

The first Chinese attack drove the Americans away from the top of the hill.

COMMANDERS IN THE 7th Division realised early on this was a crucial battle, and several companies were sent in to take back the lost territory. But no US countermeasures could handle the seemingly inexhaustible supply of Chinese troops. In addition, they now controlled the upper reaches of the hill, and from there could pepper the slopes with machine-gun fire and deliver precise artillery shots against the invading US forces as well as US positions further down the hill.

The Chinese also had another advantage. Observers on Old Baldy had an excellent overview of Pork Chop Hill and could direct both the artillery and ground-force movements from there. General Trudeau planned an attack on Old Baldy in part to

“THE COSTLY [AND] BRUTAL FIGHTING OVER PORK CHOP HILL WAS PRIMARILY A BATTLE OF WILLS MORE THAN ANYTHING ELSE.”

relieve the troops engaged at Pork Chop Hill, and in part to knock out the Chinese viewing positions, but his superiors declined his request for a battalion attack. Trudeau was only granted permission to use one company, and in light of this as well as the situation on Pork Chop Hill at that time, he abandoned the idea.

THE THIRD BATTLE of Pork Chop Hill continued until 11th July, 1953. US troops continued to make self-sacrificing counterattacks, and occasionally succeeded in reclaiming parts of the hill in return for heavy losses only to lose the same areas to the Chinese a few hours later. Faced with the prospect of having to withstand more Chinese mass attacks if they managed to recapture the hill, the US military leadership finally decided to give up Pork Chop Hill.

It appeared that a ceasefire agreement in Panmunjom was imminent, and it would have been difficult to motivate troops for a continued effort against a hill neither US public opinion nor the politicians in Washington deemed militarily important. Until 11th July, over 300 US soldiers fell in battle and closer to 900 were injured. The corresponding Chinese losses are stated at around 1,500 dead and 4,000 injured.

The costly and occasionally brutal fighting over Pork Chop Hill was primarily a battle of wills more than anything else. The hill itself was not essential to capture or retain to create a better position in the war. The front had stood still for two years and nothing suggested it would change. Pork Chop Hill became a symbol and was used as propaganda by both countries. For those Americans who defended the country's intervention in the Korean War, Pork Chop Hill symbolised the courage and sacrifice of its troops. Others believed the hill was a perfect symbol of the senseless waste of American lives.

16 days after the 7th Division withdrew all its units from the hill, a ceasefire agreement was signed in Panmunjom. Pork Chop Hill – Hill 255 – found itself in the demilitarised zone between North and South Korea. 🇺🇸

Artur Szulc is a military historian. In the autumn of 2019, his book about the Korean War will be published by Historiska Media.



Scene from the movie
Pork Chop Hill.

The controversial hill became a popular movie

★ In May 1959, the movie *Pork Chop Hill* premiered in the United States. The film director was Lewis Milestone, who had received an Oscar for *Nothing New on the West Front* (1930).

The film was based primarily on the book *Pork Chop Hill: The American Fighting Man in Action* (published in 1956), which was written by Samuel Atwood Marshall, military historian and retired brigadier general. The action concentrated around the

battles for the hill in April 1953 and not the final skirmish in July.

The role of Lieutenant Joseph G Clemons, who made a major contribution to the battle for the hill in April, was played by the popular Gregory Peck.

Other major roles were filled by major stars Rip Torn and George Peppard. The film also featured Harry Dean Stanton and Clarence Williams III, who went on to have notable TV and movie acting careers in the 1960s and beyond.



Gregory Peck (right) receives a lesson in throwing grenades by Joseph Clemons who led the US attacks on Pork Chop Hill.

In enemy hands

During the Korean War, nearly 200,000 people were taken prisoner on each side. Many died in various prison camps, others were repatriated after the war while yet more soldiers' fates remain unknown. These photos show how prisoners were handled during the war.

Text: HUGO NORDLAND



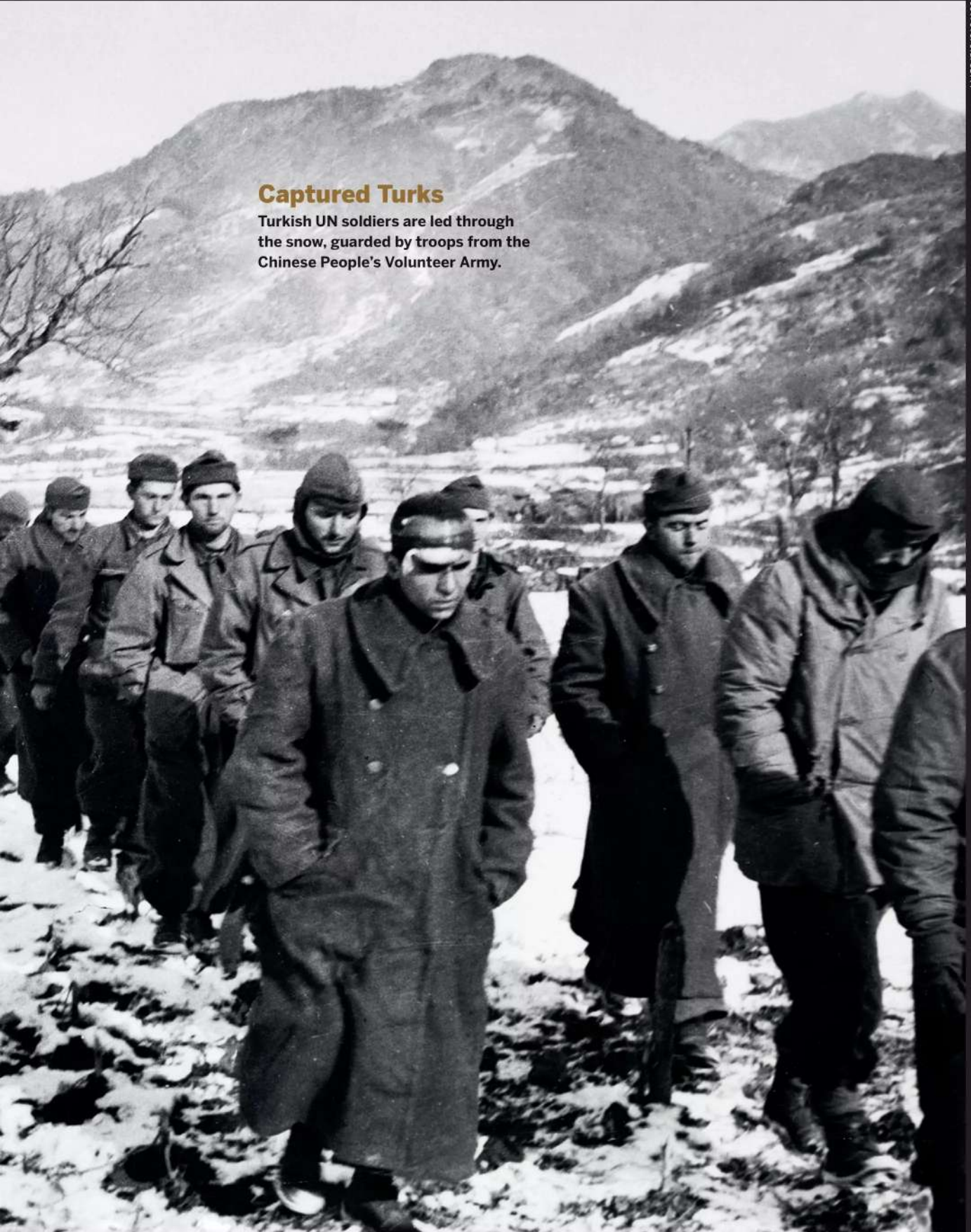
Taken at Pusan

North Korean soldier captured by US military police at the Naktong river near Pusan (now Busan). In line with the UN directives on international warfare, he carries a note stating that he is a POW. Picture taken on 4th September, 1950.



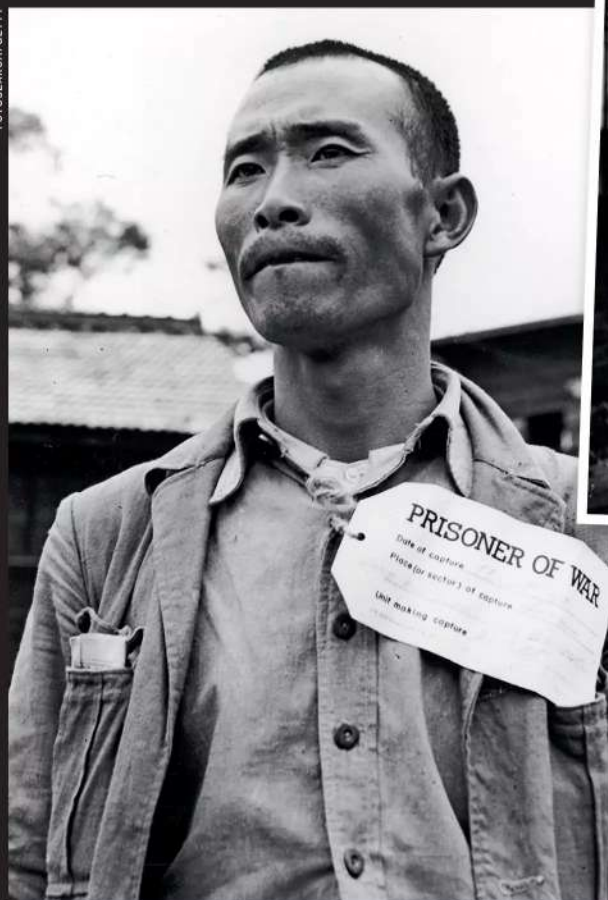
Captured Turks

Turkish UN soldiers are led through the snow, guarded by troops from the Chinese People's Volunteer Army.



THE WAR IN PICTURES

FOTOSEARCH/GETTY



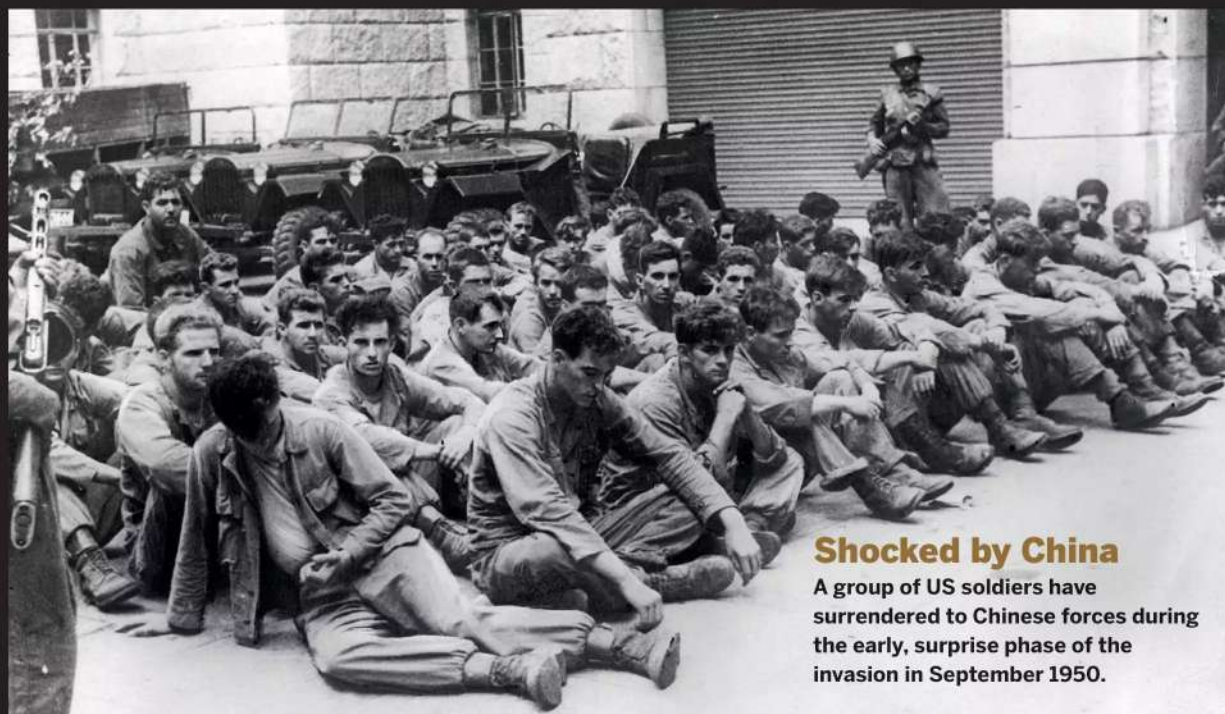
ARCHIVE IMAGE/ALAMY/IBL

Threatened with a gun ▲

South Korean military police escort a captured North Korean behind the front in July 1950.

◀ The mark of the enemy

A North Korean in captivity on 18th October, 1950. A label is attached providing information about when, where and from what division the prisoner was taken.



SOV FOTO/UG/GETTY

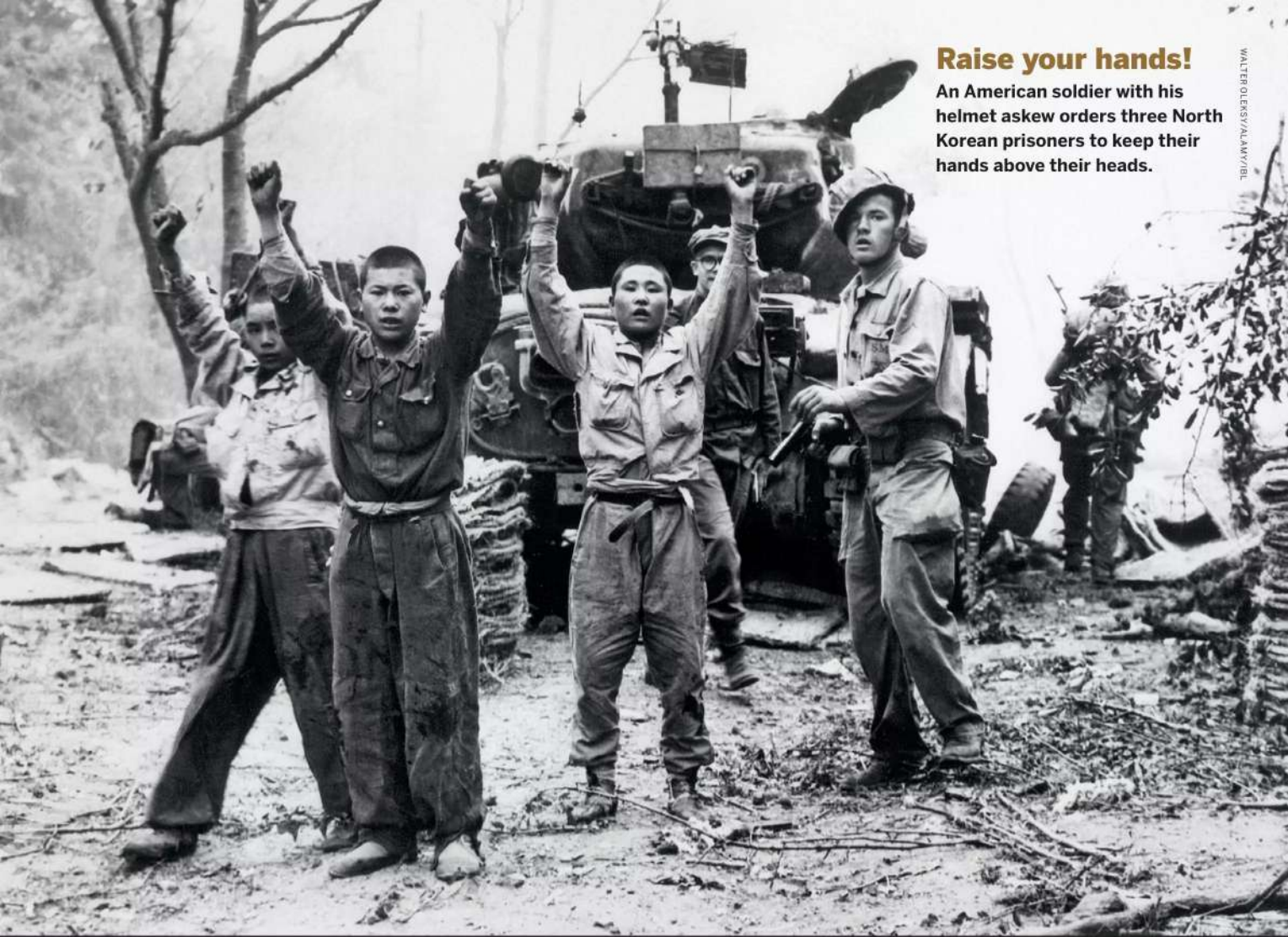
Shocked by China

A group of US soldiers have surrendered to Chinese forces during the early, surprise phase of the invasion in September 1950.

Raise your hands!

An American soldier with his helmet askew orders three North Korean prisoners to keep their hands above their heads.

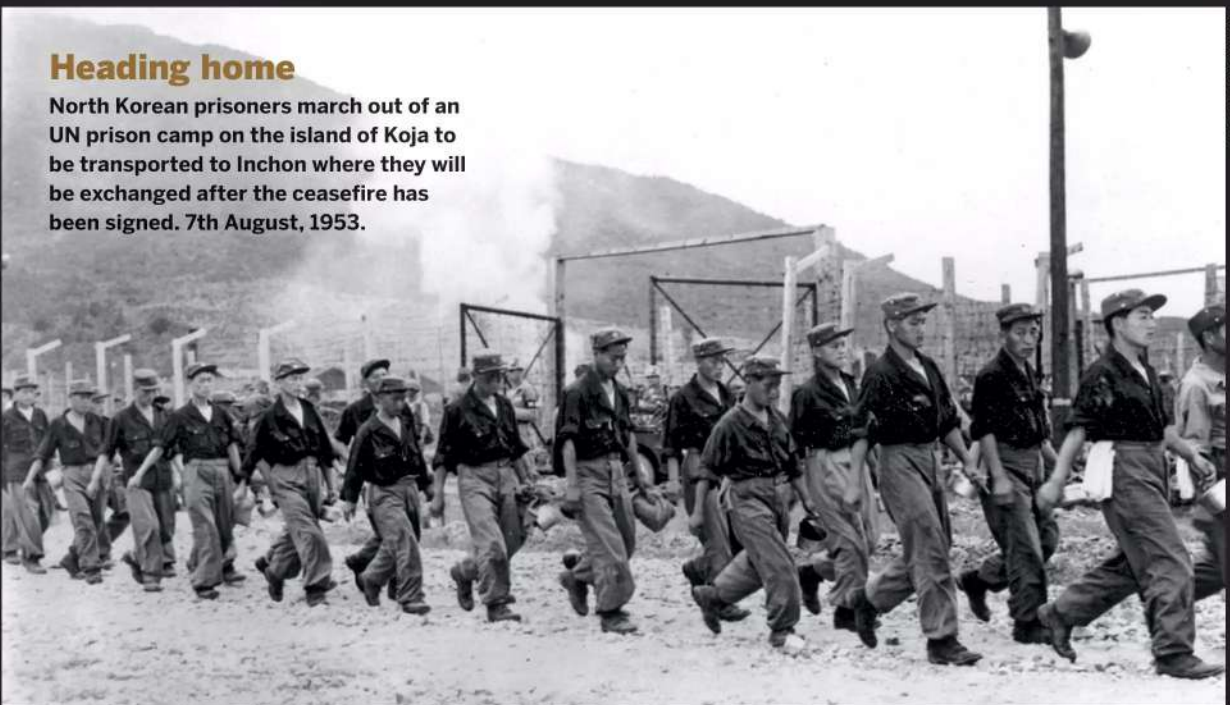
WALTER OLENSKY/ALAMY/BIL



Heading home

North Korean prisoners march out of an UN prison camp on the island of Koja to be transported to Inchon where they will be exchanged after the ceasefire has been signed. 7th August, 1953.

CENTRAL PRESS/GETTY





Operation Big Switch

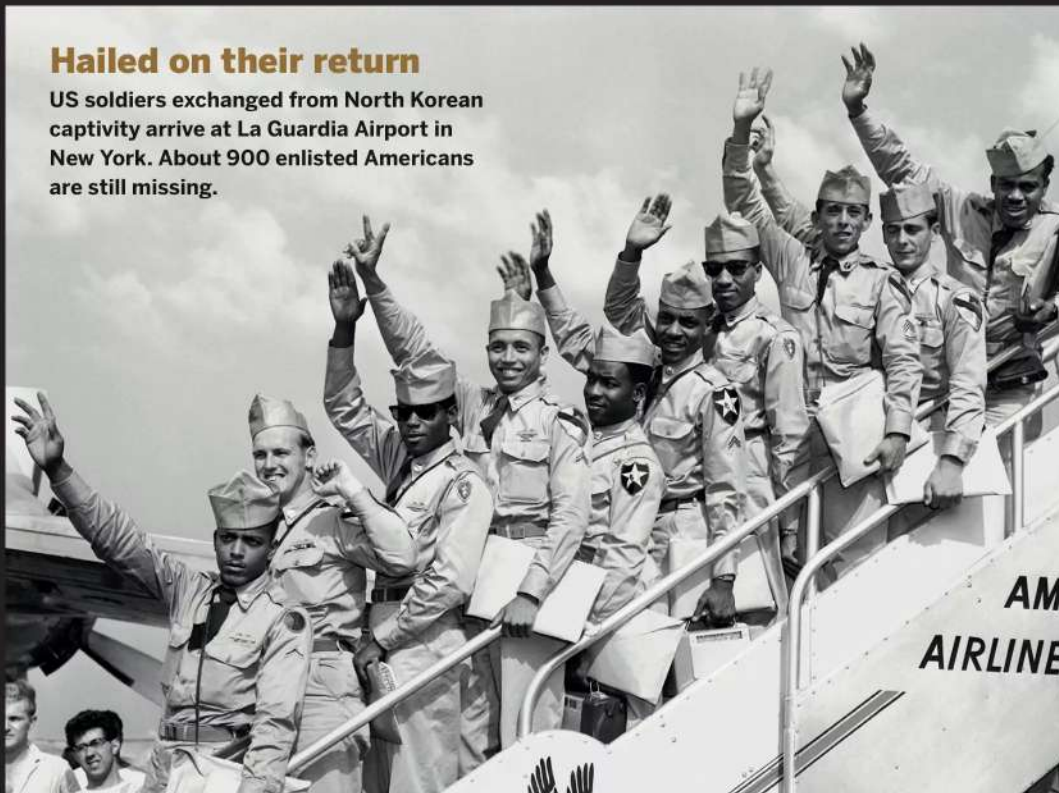
Between August and December 1953, around 77,000 North Korean and Chinese prisoners were exchanged for nearly 13,000 UN prisoners. Here, North Koreans exit a US landing vessel ahead of the exchange.

MICHAEL ROUGIER / THE LIFE PICTURE COLLECTION / GETTY



Hailed on their return

US soldiers exchanged from North Korean captivity arrive at La Guardia Airport in New York. About 900 enlisted Americans are still missing.



BETTMAN/GETTY



EVERETT/IBL

Half-naked freedom

Former prisoners from the North side celebrate their repatriation during Operation Big Switch by removing their clothes on a truck platform. Their discarded garments lay strewn along the road.



SOVIET/US/GETTY

Prison uniform is tossed away

A North Korean who was released from war captivity demonstratively rejects all the US apparel he was forced to wear while detained as a UN prisoner.

Soldiers and tanks from the US 1st Marine Division march past Chinese lines as they break out of the Chosin Reservoir where they'd been surrounded. December 1950.





WAR WEAPONS

The Korean War was fought with both new and old weapons. While modern jets duelled in the air, regular foot soldiers fought with rifles from World War II.



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A SOLDIER'S BEST

It was the infantry who did the rough work in the Korean War. The reason was that tanks and artillery were difficult to use in the mountainous terrain. Here we profile the US soldier's most common weapons.

Text: **HUGO NORDLAND**

The Korean War was the first armed conflict since World War II to become a 'frontless war'. This was down to the mountainous terrain, which both sides had to fight hard to capture the hills and mountain peaks. Vehicles and armoured forces couldn't be fully utilised, with tanks mostly serving as roadblocks, mobile artillery and even transport for wounded soldiers.

Artillery could not be fully utilised



US Infantry soldiers using the M1 Garand during the Korean War.

FRIEND

because the fighting took place at close quarters, with the risk shells could hit their own soldiers. The mountains restricted the use of direct-fire artillery, so that grenade launchers had to be used for artillery tasks.

At this time, there were still large numbers of weapons from World War II lying in US depots, which found their way on to the Korean battlefield. After the end of WWII, the United States had directed its defence budget towards nuclear weapons and strategic bombers. One consequence

of this was that infantry equipment was largely neglected.

All of these conditions influenced what was in reality an infantry war. The individual soldier and his weapon became the most important element of the US forces fighting on the Korean Peninsula, and these were exploited to their fullest in the hard fighting. The disadvantages and benefits of each weapon – and how they were subsequently used – became most evident during the Korean War. ★

- 1 M1 Garand
- 2 Browning automatic rifle
- 3 Hand grenades
- 4 Browning M1919A
- 5 M1 grenade launcher
- 6 M2 Carbine
- 7 M20 recoilless rifle

1 M1 Garand

The backbone of the infantry

★ The M1 Garand was the standard US service rifle during the Korean War. The weapon is semi-automatic and is loaded with ammunition clips of eight cartridges. The standard amount of ammunition that an individual soldier carried was 12-13 clips, or 100 cartridges.

This weapon worked very well in combat, and the soldiers had great confidence in it. The weapon was well tested after World War II and troops experienced few firing problems when using it.

Thanks to its semi-automatic

mechanism and the fact that the soldiers often directed fire against single targets, the M1 gun was most likely to have ammunition left when all other weapons had finished firing.

The M1 Garand was the backbone of the infantry, and defensive positions were built around this weapon. But that was not the deciding factor behind its widespread use. The weapon's regular battlefield range was around 200 metres, and experienced soldiers could easily hit their targets, which meant its accuracy was deemed sufficient. ★

US INFANTRY WEAPONS



Only the most experienced soldiers were equipped with the BAR.

2 Browning automatic rifle

Automatic weapon was for tactically experienced only

★ The Browning Automatic Rifle (BAR) was another key weapon in the infantry's armoury, described by Colonel David Hackworth as "the best weapon of the Korean War".

The fully automatic machine gun had a .30-06 calibre and originated in World War I. It was fed by a 20-shot magazine and had a firing rate of 500-650 shots per minute.

It combined a weight of barely nine kilograms with bipod support to make it easier to keep trained on the target,

even when using automatic fire. A key reason for the BAR's success was that the Korean terrain restricted the use of heavier machine guns.

When US positions came under Chinese automatic fire at close range, the best countermeasure was to get an experienced sniper into position and then open fire on the enemy's automatic machine gun crew.

Riflemen equipped with BARs were often experienced shooters with good tactical knowledge. ★

3 Hand grenades

Small, but effective

★ At the beginning of the Korean War, US forces used the Mk II grenade from World War II. In 1952 it was replaced by the new M26 grenade.

Both delivered explosives and shrapnel with approximately the same explosive force.

The fact that Chinese and North Korean troops sought combat at close quarters

made the grenades useful. In the 1950s no emphasis was placed on hand grenade training, and the tactical training of combining regular gunfire with throwing hand grenades did not exist.

One problem that arose with grenades was that they had to be handled with bare hands in very cold weather, which increased the risk of losing a grenade. ★

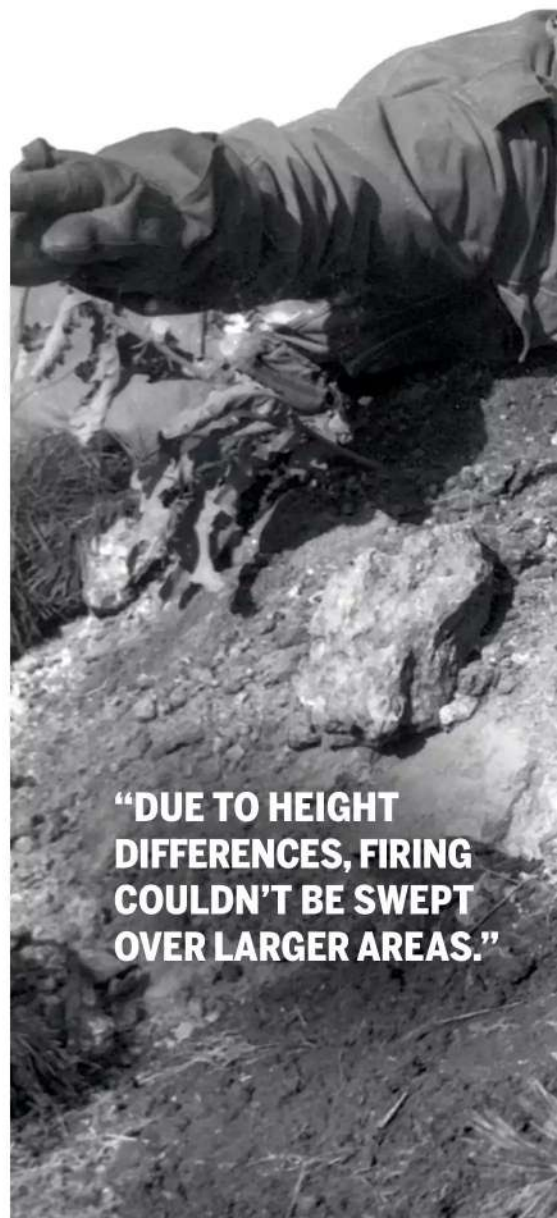


M26 hand grenade.

4 Browning M1919A

Cold led to

★ The Browning M1919 machine gun – and its A6 variant – were the standard-issue machine guns for the company. It had calibre .30-06 and was fed with strip ammunition. Its rate of fire was around 400-600 shots per minute. The weapon was mounted on a tripod (A4 model) or fitted with a two-foot leg support mounted in front (the A6). The



"DUE TO HEIGHT DIFFERENCES, FIRING COULDN'T BE SWEEPED OVER LARGER AREAS."

problems for gunners


standard amount of ammunition for each machine gun was two boxes of approximately 500 cartridges. Machine guns were used throughout the war, but due to the mountainous terrain, they weren't utilised to the full.

In defensive operations, the machine gun was often placed on the mountain side along an

anticipated route of attack, but due to height differences, firing couldn't be swept over larger areas.

In attack mode, machine gunners were often pushed too far forward and had to change position. Thus, they were exposed to hostile fire with the result that they suffered huge losses. The Browning also had numerous

problems with malfunctioning. This was probably due to the cold, but it was difficult to detect exactly why it would fail to fire.

Suspensions pointed to the weapon's action and operator. There was usually time to check that both cartridge clip and cartridges were properly in place, but this was not always done. 

Above: A Browning M1919A4 on a tripod.



An officer points out a North Korean position to one of his machine gun crew. 20th November, 1950.



5 M2 Carbine

Carbine proved unpopular

★ Most carbines used during the Korean War were the fully automatic M2 type. They were loaded with a 30-shot magazine, had a recoil dampener, and the rate of fire was about 750 shots per minute.

The carbine was the Korean War's problem child and suffered from constant misfiring, which could be attributed to the 'hyper-sensitivity' of the weapon's fully automatic function. In battle it was reported up to 85 percent of carbines were useless. In cold weather, up to 20 shots had to be fired to 'warm up' the weapon before the carbine could shoot at its nominal firing rate.

The magazine was also a problem, with ammunition corroding after a few weeks of storage leading to dirt and rust



accumulation, which would cause the magazine to stop working. Accuracy was poor over 200 metres' distance, and the power of the small .30-calibre cartridge was too weak as well: several soldiers reported they

struck enemy soldiers several times without felling their target.

Another problem was that soldiers wasted ammunition on ineffective automatic fire over long distances, especially during combat at night. ❌

The M2 became M3 when fitted with infrared light and night vision. This was powered by a large battery.

6 M1 grenade launcher

Short-range artillery substitute

★ Korea's mountain terrain made the grenade launcher a weapon of choice. As the Chinese were keen to attack at close quarters, the use of artillery was limited because of a fear of hitting your own troops. Grenades therefore had to replace artillery. The big limitation of grenade launchers was the ammunition supply, as it often had to be carried up the mountainsides.

One problem that often arose when the ground had frozen was that the tripod feet – as well as the firing mechanism – could break down. ❌



Soldiers with an 81-mm M1 grenade launcher in 1950.

Firing with a M20 75-mm recoilless rifle. The weapon was primarily used to knock out bunkers, but was also effective against enemy infantry.



7 M20 recoilless rifle

M20 destroyed bunkers

★ In Korea, the US used four different recoilless guns. At the outbreak of war, the old 2.36-inch (60-mm) M9 bazooka was used, but it soon proved unfit for combating enemy tanks. In early skirmishes, the 60-mm bazooka's rockets failed to penetrate the heavily armoured North Korean T-34/85 tanks. Soon after, a larger model was introduced with 3.5-inch (75-mm) calibre warheads, called the M20 or "Super Bazooka".

THE RECOILLESS rifle came in two calibres: 57 mm (M18), which could be fired from the shoulder, and 75 mm (M20) that could be mounted on legs or a vehicle. These weapons were used on a larger scale for the first time during the Korean

War and proved to be effective. Above all, the 75-mm model was used with great effect against the fortifications and bunkers North Korea and China had built into the mountainsides.

THE PROBLEM with these bunkers was that they couldn't be neutralised by ordinary weapons, which meant they could only be destroyed by a direct artillery hit. Any infantry attacks could normally only be attempted if soldiers got within range of a hand grenade. However, with a 75-mm recoilless rifle, US troops could direct fire from up to 1,200 metres away, effectively one mountain side to another. A direct hit with 75-mm warheads often shattered these bunkers.

The recoilless guns were heavy to drag, but the units that used them made plenty of progress. The lack of tanks meant that all of these recoilless rifles were used mainly against infantry forces. Here too, the weapons appeared effective. The ammunition available to recoilless guns included high-explosive grenades and armour-piercing shells, plus phosphorous grenades – WP or "Willy Pete" as they were called by the soldiers. The recoilless weapons, especially the 75-mm variant, became a very useful and popular weapon. 🇺🇸

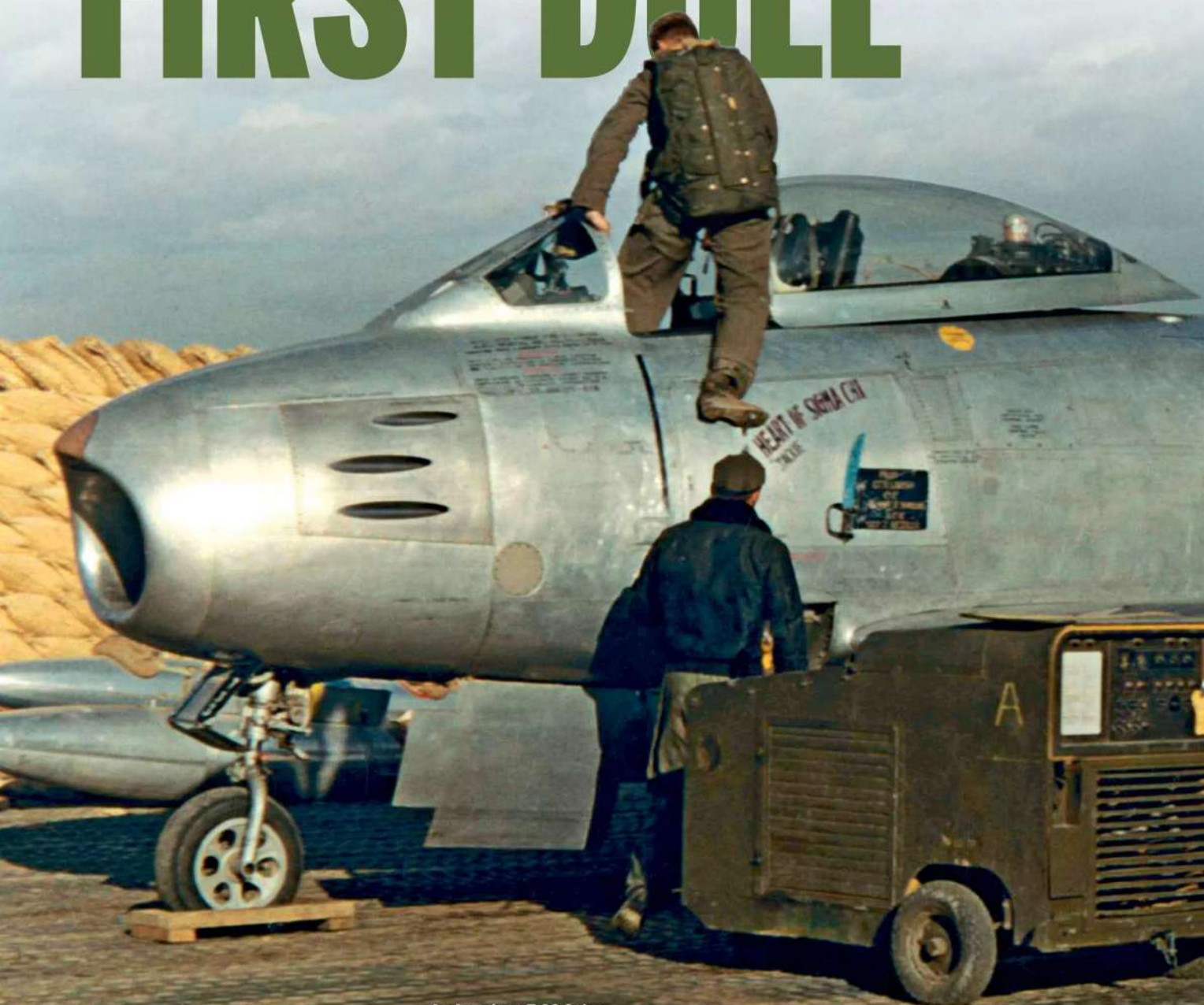
75-mm recoilless rifle.



"RECOILLESS WEAPONS [WERE] VERY USEFUL AND POPULAR"

F-86 Sabre versus MiG-15

JET FIGHTERS' FIRST DUEL



An American F-86 Sabre
Fighter at a base in South
Korea in 1951.

In November 1950, the Soviet MiG-15 was inserted into the Korean War. After initial losses, the US responded with the new F-86 Sabre. It was the start of a new era in air combat, when jet fighters duelled at near-supersonic speeds.

Text: **JOHAN VON HORN**

When over 90,000 North Korean soldiers and hundreds of tanks supported by aircraft invaded South Korea early in the morning on 25th June, 1950, the surprise was total. The weak South Korean forces were driven southwards in a panicked retreat. Neither

South Korea nor the US forces were equipped for extensive hillside fighting, and the North Koreans advanced all the way to the city of Pusan (modern-day Busan) in the south-eastern corner of the Korean Peninsula ►



The MiG-15 enjoyed success at the beginning of the war.



JET FIGHTERS' FIRST DUEL

The F9F Panther was one of the US Navy's first jet-powered fighter and attack aircraft, and it was successfully used throughout the war. Most accidents occurred at take-off and landing since the aircraft carriers were not adapted for jet planes. The picture shows USS *Princeton*. July 1951.

AMC IMAGES/TT



- ▶ before the offensive was stopped. This occurred primarily thanks to a massive effort by the US Air Force from its base in Japan.

THE MAIN TASK of the US's Pacific Air Forces (PACAF) was to defend the airspace over the mainland of Japan against the Soviet Union and China, consisting of day (jet-powered) and night (propeller-powered) patrols. Low operational and material readiness combined with inadequate instruction limited the force's ability to fight.

Despite this, it soon became possible to gain air superiority, which was a prerequisite for providing support to the few US and South Korean forces with attack aircraft, thus compensating for the uneven balance of power on the ground. North Korea's air force, which consisted of around 180 older propeller-driven Soviet fighter and attack aircraft

at the outbreak of war, had little experience and was practically defeated within a few weeks.

The air war began on 27th June, when a North Korean Jak-7U was shot down. The very next day saw the first in a series of attacks on the North Korean rail network while four B-29 Superfortress bombers attacked the bridges over the River Han.

The United Nations coalition's operations initially suffered due to a lack of airbases in South Korea. This meant the planes were forced to operate at the edge of their range from bases in Japan, which limited their staying power in the battle zone. It proved to be a strange life for aircraft personnel who, having left home in the morning, could return in time for the family's evening meal if they survived that day's combat mission.

US FORCES ACCOUNTED for most of the personnel flying missions, who were relatively inexperienced since many WWII veterans had already left active flight service by the time the Korean War broke out. Losses were therefore huge at the outset, primarily among the bomber forces, who had pilots who too often made the mistake of

“THE AIR WAR BEGAN ON 27TH JUNE, WHEN A NORTH KOREAN JAK-7U WAS SHOT DOWN”

Unclear who won the first battle

★ US sources claim that the first air victory in history between two jets should be attributed to Lieutenant Russell J Brown from the 51st Fighter Interceptor Wing, who allegedly shot down a MiG-15 piloted by Soviet pilot Lieutenant Kharitonov on 8th November, 1950. Other sources claim, however, that Kharitonov returned

to his base and that it was Soviet lieutenant Khominich who first shot down a F-80 on 1st November.

One reason for the uncertain Soviet information is that the MiG-15's camera only took eight images per second – and stopped at the same moment the pilot released his trigger. That meant if he opened fire

at 400-600 metres distance, the camera stopped shooting as the shells reached their target. Soviet pilots often failed to credit their own strikes, while the US pilot's superior cameras made it easier for them to verify their kills.



attempting repeated attacks at low altitude against targets with strong air defences.

When the war broke out, the US aircraft carrier USS *Valley Forge* was quickly deployed to Korea complete with jet-powered Grumman F9F-3 Panther fighters. The aircraft flew in the middle of the transitional period between propeller and jet propulsion, where a combination of the jet aircraft's increased tyre pressures, inexperienced pilots and high landing speed led to the Korean War being one of the blackest periods for US Navy aircraft, with the highest accident rate in history. The experiences in Korea led to a reconstruction of carriers to improve safety – one such innovation saw the introduction of angled flight decks, for example.

Initially, the coordination between PACAF, navy and Marine Corps aircraft operations was non-existent, which reduced the effectiveness of their combat power and endurance. For example, US Navy aircraft from Task Force 77 attacked Pyongyang in early July 1950 without first coordinating with the USAF's operation management. It forced them to suspend bombing raids with heavy B-29 bombers to avoid accidents. Afterwards, an effort was made to bring order when the commander of the PACAF forces demanded all aircraft missions fall under a joint operational commander.

This was completely rejected by the navy and commander-in-chief of the UN forces, General Douglas MacArthur, was only able to promise "coordination control", an essentially meaningless term that was easy to ignore. This lack of cooperation characterised efforts throughout the war and led to resources not being utilised optimally. And if it were possible, coordination with aircraft from other participating countries – primarily Britain, South Africa and Australia – was even worse.

AS THE SITUATION on the ground stabilised in the autumn of 1950 and the supply of ground troops and aircraft increased, the UN coalition took the

initiative and drove the North Koreans northwards. At the same time, the US Marine Corps conducted a landing at Inchon (now Incheon) on the west coast to cut off the North Koreans' retreat, thus creating an opportunity to crush the enemy once and for all. The war in the air during this period was primarily dominated by liaising air strikes and bombers in addition to directly supporting ground forces (close air support). This relationship continued to govern air operations into the following year.

The experience gained during the successful use of attack aircraft during ground fighting in Europe just six years earlier had been forgotten ►



US B-29 Superfortress aircraft were used to bomb North Korea's infrastructure and factories. The picture is from February 1951.

JET FIGHTERS' FIRST DUEL

- ▶ after the emergence of nuclear doctrine and the US had to start again from scratch developing methods for allocating airborne support, targeting, communication procedures and so on.

Propeller-driven attack bombers, especially the US Navy and Marine Corps' Corsair and Skyraider planes, were well-suited for close air support thanks to a combination of good load capacity and endurance. Thanks to their air-cooled engines, they weren't as vulnerable as the Mustang, Seafire and Firefly with their liquid-cooled Merlin engines. The latter types, primarily used by British, South African and Australian forces, were often victims of the strong and well-functioning North Korean air defences, which mostly consisted of heavy machine guns and automatically reloading artillery.

Jet-powered attack bombers, the F-80 Shooting Star and the F-84 Thunderstreak, went after fixed targets like bridges and fortifications, as well as easily identifiable targets in the form of trains and vehicle columns, while the slower propeller-driven attack bombers were deployed against the North Korean forces.

BY THE END of October 1950, the B-29 Superfortress heavy bombers had crushed North Korea's industry. Then these aircraft were also used to attack bridges and rail junctions as well as to combat troop concentrations on the ground. Conditions on the few aircraft bases the UN coalition had on the Korean Peninsula were

"SOVIET PILOTS WORE CHINESE UNIFORMS AND WERE INSTRUCTED TO SPEAK CHINESE"

primitive. Barracks consisted of simple 12-man tents and – in the best cases – a dining hall and separate barracks for command staff.

Initially, they also lacked ground personnel, and it was up to the aircraft's crew to restock their planes. Throughout the war there was a huge shortage of spare parts, and lengthy requisition procedures for necessary equipment did nothing to improve the situation.

ON 26TH OCTOBER, 1950, UN coalition forces had driven the remnants of the North Korean Army across the border into China at the Yalu River. This prompted China to intervene in the war by sending 50 infantry divisions of 'volunteers' across the Yalu into North Korea.

According to an aid agreement with the Soviet Union, Soviet 'volunteers' provided pilots for the Chinese air force while the newly established People's Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF) was trained by Soviet instructors.

Soviet pilots wore Chinese uniforms and were instructed to speak Chinese when they used the radio during flight. They created a glossary of the

American bases in Korea were often makeshift and required a lot of maintenance. Here, a runway in Pyongyang is extended with perforated steel planking laid on empty rice bags.

US AIR FORCE



most common expressions they'd use, but this was abandoned after the first air skirmishes and soon Soviet pilots spoke to each other as usual.

On 1st November, 1950 the 1st Squadron of the Soviet 72nd Guards Fighter Aviation Regiment PVO launched from its base in Manchuria to meet incoming US planes south of the Yalu River with its MiG-15 jet fighters. Thus, a new phase began that would last throughout the war.

The combat that followed was notable for the fact that two types of fighter jets met in large numbers within a restricted airspace in a way that has not occurred since. This area in the north-west of Korea became known in the West under the name of "MiG Alley". It was also the first time that aviation battles were fought almost at the speed of sound, and factors such as good training and superior technology would prove decisive.

Aircraft losses on the UN side increased markedly once the MiG-15 aircraft entered the fray. These were totally superior to both US F-80 Shooting Star and Australian Gloster Meteor jet fighters. At the beginning of November, the first of several B-29 aircraft was shot down, and gradually losses for the heavy bomber forces rose to over 10 percent per mission, which in the long run was unsustainable. This forced the B-29s to operate only at night if they couldn't obtain a powerful jet fighter escort. The aircraft also incurred significant losses from North Korea's air defences.

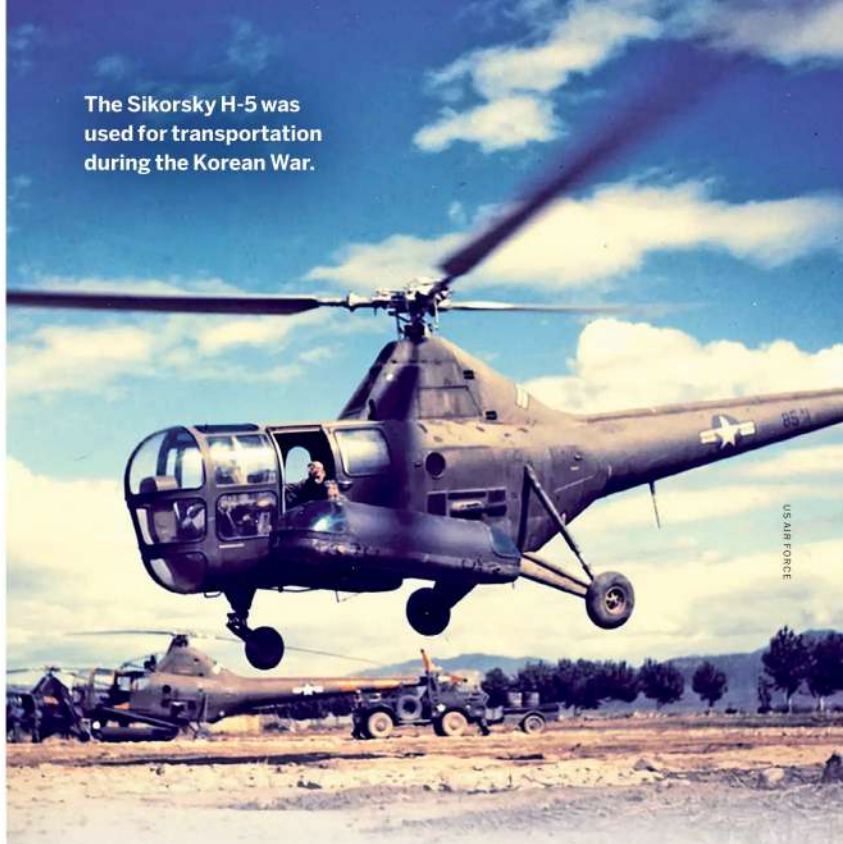
GRADUALLY, THE NORTH Koreans built radar-led systems with Soviet crews and assistance, which in combination with the MiG-15 secured them an advantage in MiG Alley. It forced the commanders of the USAF to accelerate deployment of the F-86 Sabre jet fighter. It was the only fighter capable of taking up the battle with the MiG-15.

Despite this, the highly influential leader of Strategic Air Command, General Curtis E LeMay, was reluctant to allocate the latest technology to what he considered a 'secondary theatre of war'.

LeMay favoured prioritising a hypothetical nuclear war with the Soviet Union, despite the fact it was in a very real, conventional war that US soldiers and pilots were dying. Therefore, newer bombers like the B-36 and jet-powered B-47 Stratojet were never used during the Korean War. In the case of the Sabre fighter, however, LeMay had to give way, and in early December 1950 the first F-86A aircraft were deployed to Japan and Korea. Thus, future air battles were fought on more equal terms.

The MiG-15 and F-86 Sabre were post-war constructions based on German research into arrow-shaped swept wings. The MiG-15's Klimov engine was based on a Rolls Royce model, which had been exported by the UK to the Soviet Union ►

The Sikorsky H-5 was used for transportation during the Korean War.



US AIR FORCE

Helicopter's successful baptism of fire in Korea

★ "The helicopter is aerodynamically unsound... No matter what the Army says, I know that it does need any."

That was Major General Carl Brandt's blunt response when the US Air Force Planning Department was asked about using helicopters in military operations in 1948. Only two years later, they were tested extensively over Korea.

The helicopter would prove to be a particularly useful instrument, countering the planning chief's prediction. Despite their limited range and payload, they were used successfully for both transport and rescue. However, it wasn't

until wars in Algeria and Vietnam that the helicopter's potential was fully realised.

The likes of the Bell H-13 Sioux, Sikorsky H-5 Dragonfly and H-19 were used to transport wounded. The Sikorsky H-19 was also used for transporting personnel and equipment. The engines in these helicopters were piston-driven and so had relatively limited range and load capacity.

The US Navy also used the H-5 Dragonfly as a rescue helicopter to pick up pilots that had been shot down or who for other reasons had ejected their plane.

Sikorsky H-19 Chicasaw.



Bell H-13 Sioux.



JET FIGHTERS' FIRST DUEL

- ▶ in 1946. These had subsequently been copied and refined into the MiG-15's design, saving the Soviets several years of development work.

The MiG-15 was lighter than the F-86, which gave it superior lift and thrust. The plane had extremely powerful armaments (two 23-mm guns as well as a 37-mm autocannon), but often it couldn't be fully exploited due to a lack of reliability, low rate of fire and because the relatively light fighter couldn't provide a stable platform for targeting the guns.

The F-86 Sabre aircraft had a much weaker armament (just six 12.7-mm heavy machine guns). They were extremely reliable however, and the lesser impact of the calibre in a single shot was compensated by a much higher firing rate and a radar gunsight that ensured fire from the plane's more stable platform was in the right direction. The weight of the Sabre jet could also be used to dive into or away from MiG-15 planes. This situation was comparable to the US F4F Wildcat fighters when they faced the lighter Japanese Zero fighters in the early 1940s.

THE AMERICAN FIGHTERS also had training that was superior to both North Korean and Chinese pilots. This gave them an advantage in the initial phase of the war. Compared to Soviet pilots, their training wasn't probably better, but US pilots flew 50-60 missions alongside more experienced

colleagues before they could be promoted to squadron leader, something that allowed them to build up their experience. US fighter forces also rotated their pilots individually, which helped newcomers learn from veterans. On the other hand, Soviet fighter squadrons were rotated purely on their strength levels, which meant many potentially good MiG pilots never had the opportunity of gaining enough combat experience before they became victims of the Sabre's machine guns.

Another disadvantage for the Soviet pilots was that, unlike their American colleagues, they lacked G-suits. As a result, they struggled to cope with the rigours of battles where they were forced to perform tight turns, which meant they couldn't take advantage of the fact their planes had superior manoeuvrability compared to their opponent's.

The significantly higher G-forces in jet fighters was a key difference compared to dogfights between propeller aircraft. Another critical factor was the time from discovering a fighter plane until making contact – roughly speaking it was halved compared to just a few years earlier. Now it took just 11 seconds from discovering a plane five kilometres away to engaging it.

In that time, the pilot had to make several decisions that were crucial to the duel's outcome. Should he turn, rise, dive or do something else? The longer he hesitated, the greater the risk that he wouldn't have time to make any more decisions. When he came within shooting range he had a tiny window in which to aim and open fire. A combination of fast reflexes and a good situational awareness was required to be successful, which amazingly, many pilots on both sides managed to master.

Overall, the Sabre and MiG-15 aircraft were relatively equal in a dogfight, but the Americans were often inferior in number. Despite this the USAF was able to shoot down 379 MiG-15s while they lost 103 F-86 Sabres in combat. These numbers emerged from the Americans after the war, and don't include the biggest exaggerations. Nevertheless, there are numerous margins of error that make the data uncertain, but the battles in MiG Alley must be viewed as a success for US pilots.

THROUGHOUT THE WAR, the UN alliance's aircraft were restricted by the fact they couldn't operate north of the Yalu River. Political leaders wouldn't risk a full-scale war with China, which could have been the consequence of territorial incursions. This gave the North the advantage of being able to operate from bases in China without risk of escalating the fighting. Eventually, US leaders overlooked this, allowing some pilots and groups to cross the border and attack the Soviet ▶

“THE LONGER HE HESITATED, THE GREATER THE RISK HE WOULDN'T HAVE TIME TO MAKE ANY MORE DECISIONS”



The F-80 Shooting Star belonged to the first generation of jets and was inferior to the Soviet MiG-15 fighter. Despite this, the USAF was reluctant for a long time to deploy modern aircraft because Korea was considered a secondary theatre of war.

Nazi research behind MiG-15

★ As with US jet aircraft, German World War II research formed the basis of some of the technology behind the MiG-15 (named after its manufacturer Mikoyan and Gurevich Design Bureau). The swept-back wing design made the plane faster and provided better manoeuvrability over older jets with straight wings. The engines were an evolved version of the British Rolls-Royce "Nene", which powered the F9F Panther.

The MiG-15 and F-86 Sabre were closely matched in technology: the MiG-15 had better climb rate and acceleration but could be more difficult to manoeuvre at very high speed while the heavier F-86 aircraft had better diving capabilities. One of Sabre's major advantages was the radar gunsight that gave its pilot better accuracy.

The key to the dogfights was often the pilots. The US had the jump when it came to training, and in battles with North Korean and Chinese pilots the F-86 most commonly won. The balance between US and Soviet pilots – who included many WWII veterans – was considerably more even.

The new Soviet jet was an unpleasant surprise for the UN's troops when it first appeared in the Korean skies. A \$100,000 reward was offered to anyone who could capture a MiG-15 to study it. On 21st September, 1953, two months after the ceasefire, North Korean Lieutenant No Kum-Sok landed at the airbase in Kimpo. He nevertheless claimed that he knew nothing about the promise of the reward.



North Korean pilot
No Kum-Sok.



The MiG-15's weapons were collected in the nose and could be lowered. This made them easier to maintain and reload. The plane in the picture is painted with US markings.



MiG-15



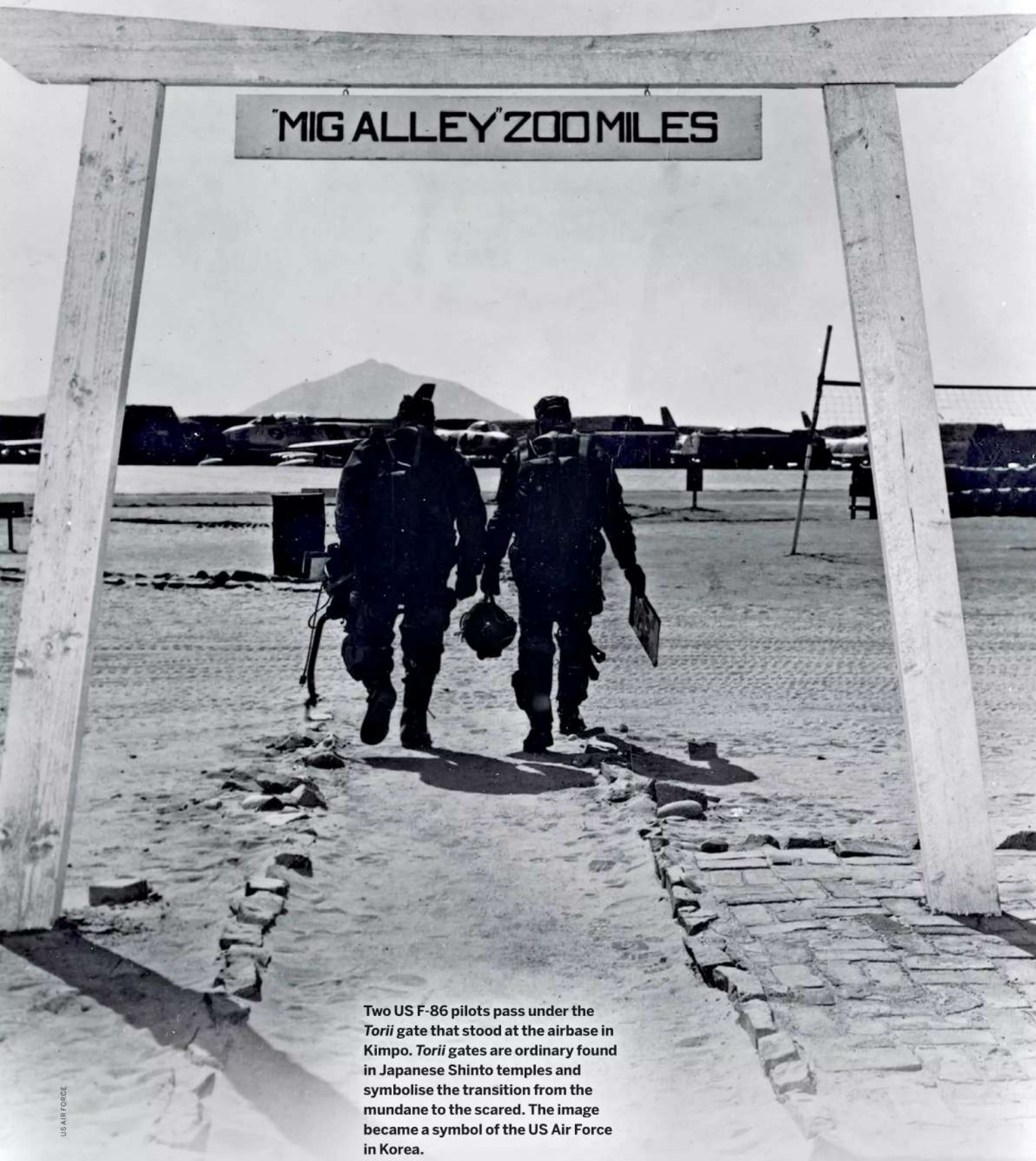
F-86 Sabre

6,105 kg	Maximum weight	6,894 kg
26.5 kN	Engine power	26.3 kN
1,200 km	Range	2,454 km
50 m/s	Rate of climb	45.7 m/s
1,102 km/h	Maximum speed	1,091 km/h
1x37-mm and	Armament	6 x 12.7 mm
2x 23-mm autocannons		machine guns
Gyro	Targeting	Gyro, radar



A Chinese MiG-15 on
a runway during the
Korean War.

JET FIGHTERS' FIRST DUEL



Two US F-86 pilots pass under the *Torii* gate that stood at the airbase in Kimpo. *Torii* gates are ordinary found in Japanese Shinto temples and symbolise the transition from the mundane to the sacred. The image became a symbol of the US Air Force in Korea.

“THIS [NEW TECHNIQUE] ALLOWED THE NORTHERN SIDE TO ADAPT ITS TACTICS”

► aircraft on both take-off and landing. In this way, they were able to inflict many losses. If UN forces had not been restricted in any way, they'd have probably been able to gain complete air sovereignty throughout the theatre of war.

A small number of jet-powered RB-45C Tornado bombers were utilised for special reconnaissance missions deep inside the enemy's territory in both North Korea and China. These operations also included the mapping of targets in China and the eastern part of the Soviet Union, which the US was considering using nuclear weapons against. The missions were carried out under the greatest secrecy, and sometimes intelligence personnel accompanied the expeditions.

During one such mission in December 1950, a Tornado plane was shot down by Soviet fighters. Its 'special passenger' – USAF Colonel John Lovell, an intelligence officer from the Pentagon – was captured. Such a high-ranking intelligence officer could have become an incredibly important source for the northern coalition – if they'd managed to make him speak. Soviet advisors were left frustrated when their hosts failed to realise the prisoner's value. Instead, the North Koreans killed Lovell when he showed a lack of respect by failing to stand for a North Korean general.

The North Koreans' treatment of prisoners of war was extremely brutal and this episode eventually led the Soviet Union to force a change, perhaps not so much from compassion or respect for the Geneva Convention, but rather to avoid repeating such a blunder. The Chinese therefore took over responsibility for the handling of prisoners of war and collaborated with the Soviets to develop methods for exploiting the prisoner's intelligence, such as through brainwashing.

Over time they developed effective techniques, including getting US pilots to describe the performance and limitations of the F-86 Sabre in detail, how its radar gunsight worked and how to counter US tactics. In the short term, this allowed the northern side to adapt its tactics when battling the Sabre aircraft, but more importantly, over the long term there were technological gains as well as knowledge of the West's combat tactical development.

THE KOREAN WAR proved a breakthrough for jet-powered combat aircraft, which provided a driving force for both development in technical



A F-84 Thunderjet is armed with bombs. The Korean War was vital for the development of attack aircraft. This had been a neglected theme once the nuclear threat became reality, despite the fact attack aircraft had been extremely effective at the end of WWII.

Korean War's ace pilots

★ The three leading fighter pilots on each side:

North

Major Nikolai Sutyagin22 victories
Colonel Yevgeny Pepelyaev19 victories
Colonel Lev Sjukin17 victories

South

Captain Joseph C McConnell16 victories
Major James Jabara15 victories
Captain Manuel J Fernandez14.5 victories

construction as well as combat techniques and tactics. Without the experiences in Korea, the development of jet combat planes would probably have focused more on the requirements associated with developing bombers capable of dropping nuclear weapons from a high altitude.

The US view that the United States would never fight a similar war led the US Air Force to prepare for a total nuclear war without exploiting the lessons learned from Korea in terms of a limited conventional war. Instead, defence policy slogans were based around deterrent and MAD (Mutual Assured Destruction).

A few years later, when the US was pulled into another conventional war in Vietnam, the US Air Force was still poorly prepared for the limited but very real realities of the war. ★

Johan von Horn is a former Swedish Army major.

Further reading:
Korean Air War (2003) by Robert F Dorr and Warren Thompson ★
Soviet MiG-15 Aces of the Korean War (2008) by Leonid Krylov and Yuriy Tepsurkaev ★
The Bridges at Toko-Ri (1953) by James A Michener.

Keeping track: tanks in Korea

The terrain in Korea didn't really suit tank warfare and it was the infantry who did the hard work. Nevertheless, numerous tanks were deployed to the peninsula and went on to fight in hundreds of battles.

Text: **HUGO NORDLAND**

- 1 M4A3 Sherman
- 2 T34/85
- 3 Centurion (A41)
- 4 Type 95 Ha-Go
- 5 M26 Pershing
- 6 Mk VIII Cromwell
- 7 M46 Patton

Two M4A3 Shermans try to tow a third damaged tank from its exposed position on a battlefield near Kunming on 15th May, 1952.

"THE MOUNTAINOUS TERRAIN OF KOREA FREQUENTLY RESULTED IN TANKS AND INFANTRY ENGAGING IN CLOSE COMBAT"

1. M4A3 Sherman

The workhorse of World War II

★ The M4 was the US Army's main battle tank when the Korean War broke out. Medium-heavy in size, it was relatively cheap to make: almost 50,000 units were produced during WWII. It was eventually deployed away from the front line and used to perform secondary tasks, but in its day, it was considered both reliable and flexible.

The version used in Korea was the M4A3 (76), also known as the 'Easy Eight'. It was equipped with a new Ford V8 engine and its primary weapon was a 76-mm gun. Earlier versions had a design fault that could ignite fires in the tank's magazines if a part of the chassis was hit during battle. This was because most of the ammunition was stored

above the track assemblies, high up on both sides of the tank's body. To solve this in the short term, extra armour plates were welded on to the outer body to protect the vulnerable sections. The later M4A3 (76) W was also fitted with wet storage, which meant that the main gun's ammunition was placed in racks surrounded by water-filled jackets on the floor of the tank's hull beneath the turret, as far from enemy strikes as possible.

THE MOUNTAINOUS terrain of Korea frequently resulted in tanks and infantry engaging in close combat. The Sherman managed well in these conditions. In World War II, the Sherman had struggled in battles fought at long range because

its gun couldn't easily penetrate the front armour of heavier tanks. It provided excellent support for infantry units, though, taking out machine-gun nests and bunkers buried in the hilly terrain. Its main gun was also highly effective at blasting away earthworks from enemy emplacements, while its machine gun cut down softer targets with equal efficiency.

EVENTUALLY, THE Sherman was replaced on the front line by the M46 Patton series of tanks. The Korean War signalled the end of the Sherman's role in US military actions, but the reliable machine wasn't quite ready for retirement and continued to be used by some countries for decades to come. 🇺🇸



2. T34/85

The North's early saviour

★ When North Korea invaded South Korea in June 1950, it came with 120 medium-heavy T-34/85 tanks. They were initially opposed by US-built, lightweight M24 Chaffees, but there was no real resistance: the M24's outdated armour and 60-mm gun was incapable of standing up to the Soviet-made T-34.

During World War II, the T-34/76 had been the Red Army's most successful tank design. It was the equal of Germany's Panzer, but was produced in far greater numbers.

The upgraded T-34/85 tank had a larger turret, manned by three men, rather than two. This meant that the

tank's commander, who had previously doubled up as the gunner, was now able to focus on leading the crew, while a dedicated gunner took control of the main gun.

The change in name indicates the other major upgrade: the 76-mm barrel of the T-34/76 was replaced with an 85-mm one on the T-34/85, which improved the tank's firepower.

HOWEVER, THINGS changed after the landing at Inchon in September 1950 when UN forces began to roll mightier tanks into the fray. The US brought the M4A3 Sherman, the M26 Pershing and

the M46 Patton, while the British added the Comet and the Centurion.

Suddenly, the alliance had the upper hand in terms of attacking strength, and North Korea lost 100 of its tanks as it was forced to retreat north. The T-34s weren't just being lost due to tougher resistance on the ground, though; US bombers were also harrying the retreating army from the air.

CHINA DIDN'T bring many heavy armoured vehicles when it entered the war – just a few hundred T-34/85 and JS-2 tanks. Instead, the Chinese offensive was based on massive infantry

US soldiers inspect a captured T-34/85 that has sunk in heavy clay.



raids with the tanks deployed as mobile artillery units, designed to support the foot soldiers.

As a result, there were relatively few tank-to-tank battles during the war. According to US estimates, there were only 119 such duels, in which 97 T-34/85 tanks were destroyed. 🇺🇸

**“97 T-34/85 TANKS
WERE DESTROYED”**

3. Centurion (A41)

Debutant braved the cold

★ One of the 20th century's most successful tanks was put into battle for the first time in Korea in January 1951. The British medium-heavy Centurion tank was developed at the end of World War II to match the German Tiger, its debut was delayed by Germany's surrender in May 1945.

In the Battle of the Imjin River on 22nd-25th April, 1951, the Centurion protected the retreat of the British 29th Infantry Brigade with great success.

Korea's inhospitable winter climate was a real trial for many tanks, but the Centurion handled it admirably. They were liable to freeze in the ground overnight, but the crews solved that problem by parking them on straw. Even then, every half an hour the engine had to be started and each gear engaged in turn in to prevent them freezing in place.

The Centurion became a successful export model and was sold to 19 different countries. 🇺🇸



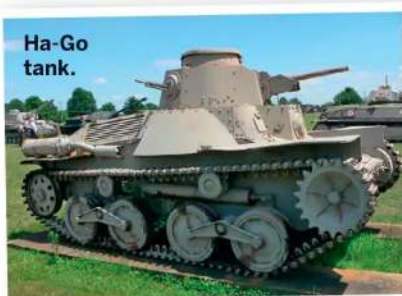
4. Type 95 Ha-Go

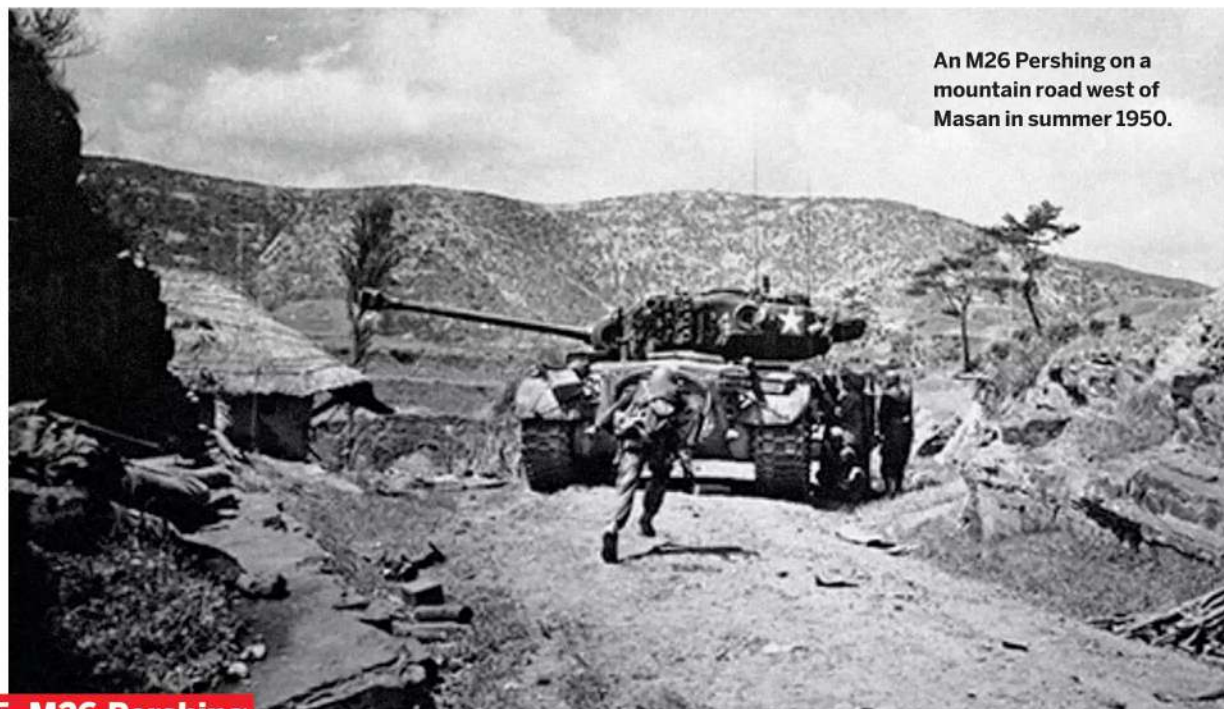
Too old, too fragile and too weak

★ The lightweight Ha-Go was used by Japan during World War II, but when the emperor surrendered, several of the Japanese-made tanks were abandoned in continental Asia. In the Korean War, a few Ha-Go models appeared on the Chinese

side, and occasionally featured in the South Korean line-up, too.

Even before the end of WWII, the Ha-Go had been outclassed by the Sherman, and its vulnerabilities were soon exposed in Korea. The armour plating was too thin, and the 37-mm gun lacked sufficient firepower to tackle the Shermans, let alone the tougher tanks that the UN forces brought to the offensive in autumn 1950. 🇺🇸





An M26 Pershing on a mountain road west of Masan in summer 1950.

PJF/MILITARY COLLECTION/ALAMY/IBL

5. M26 Pershing

Defeated by the terrain

★ While the Centurion was Britain's answer to the German Panther and Tiger tanks during World War II, the M26 Pershing was the US response. Like the Centurion, though, the Pershing only made its entrance after the conflict in Europe had been decided in 1945.

However, it did manage to prove that its 90-mm gun could knock out Panther and Tiger

tanks with relative ease from around 900 metres out.

The Korean War provided the Pershing with its 15 minutes of fame. The M26 accounted for half of the T-34/85 tanks defeated during the UN counteroffensive during the autumn of 1950. At close range, the main gun could even blast through a T-34 from front to rear. On the other hand, the Pershing



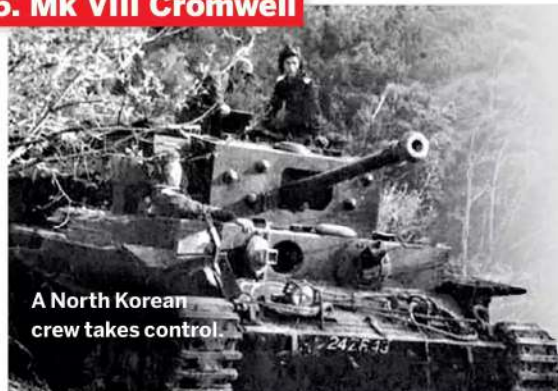
General John J Pershing led the American Expeditionary Force in World War I.

had great difficulty coping with the uneven clay terrain of the Korean Peninsula.

As the war developed, there were fewer and fewer tank duels and the disadvantages of using the M26 began to seriously outweigh its benefits.

By 1951, the Pershing's time in the spotlight was over as the US began to phase out the M26 in favour of the M46 Patton. 🇺🇸

6. Mk VIII Cromwell



A North Korean crew takes control.

Captive Cromwells fell into Korean hands

★ The British decided to deploy the lighter Churchill and Cromwell cruiser tanks to Korea because of the country's poor roads and hilly terrain. In the Battle of Happy Valley, the North

Koreans managed to capture several Cromwell tanks and put them into service with their own crews. Some were eventually recaptured, but at least one was destroyed in an encounter with a Centurion. 🇺🇸

7. M46 Patton

The Korean War tiger

★ When the military discovered that the M26 Pershing did not fulfil their needs for a medium-heavy tank following the end of World War II, work began on a major upgrade.

Soon, the updates – including the inclusion of a whole new engine and gearbox – became so numerous that the tank was given a new designation: M46. It was also dubbed Patton in honour of the legendary tank and cavalry general.

THE ADVANTAGES of the new tank came primarily from its thick plating: in places, the front and side armour measured 102 mm. Like the M26 it was replacing, the Patton was also armed with a

90-mm tank gun. And while the 49-tonne tank was heavier than a T-34, it was almost as fast: the top speed of the Patton was 48 kilometres per hour compared to the T-34's 52 km/h.

THE PATTON tank came into service the same year as the Korean War broke out and landed on the peninsula on 8th August, 1950. For each M46 added to the battlefield, one M26 Pershing was removed. Thanks to its reputation for reliability, the M4 Sherman survived a little longer.

The Patton proved superior to the T-34 tanks fielded by the North and they contributed greatly to the rapid recovery of occupied territory in South Korea in 1950.

The tank also played an important role in the defence of the key city of Pusan during the second half of the year.

The M46 also offered armoured support to the marines during their landing at Inchon and provided critical protection to ground forces during the UN's retreat in the face of China's push south in 1951.

The Korean War was the only conflict in which the M46 was deployed. By 1952, the US military began replacing the two-year-old model with the M47 tank, which was also known as Patton. 🇺🇸



The M46 was named after the legendary tank and cavalry general, George S Patton.

“THE PATTON PROVED SUPERIOR TO THE [NORTH’S] T-34 TANK”

A tank's crew posing on their M-46 Patton, which has been painted to look like a tiger.



UNIVERSAL HISTORY ARCHIVE/ UIG/ GETTY

A bridge over the Geum river, a few kilometres north of Taejeon, is hit by a US radio-controlled precision bomb. July, 1950.





WAR TACTICS

Technological innovations appeared to give the Korean War a new character. But despite this, the conflict ended in the old, familiar pattern of trenches and carpet bombing.

- 106 New technology,
old tactics**
- 110 Trench warfare**
- 112 Air warfare**
- 114 Special forces &
guerrillas**
- 116 Aerial salvo
misses target**

NEW TECHNOLOGY, OLD TACTICS

PHOTOQUEST/GETTY



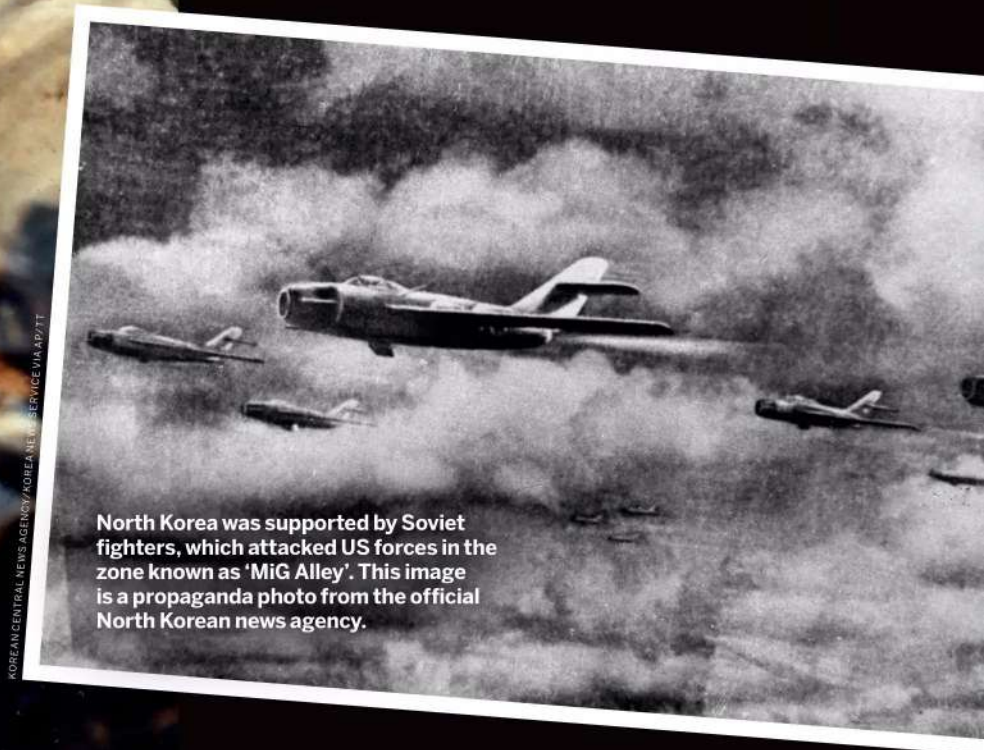
In early summer 1951, a system of trenches ran across the Korean Peninsula. In this image, US soldiers defend their position against the enemy.

The traditional image of the Korean War is a struggle between modern, well-equipped forces and overwhelming numbers of basic infantry. The reality was much more complex. We examine different aspects of the conflict – the trench warfare, the battle in the skies, and the work of guerrillas and special forces – to offer a more comprehensive picture.



On Sunday, 25th June, 1950, the army of communist North Korea rolled over the 38th parallel, the border between North and South Korea. The two countries had been freed from Japanese occupation in 1945 by Soviet and US troops. The North Korean army outnumbered its South Korean rival by two to one, and moreover, it was better equipped thanks to its arsenal of Soviet-made tanks.

The North Koreans had been trained by Soviet military advisors, but Stalin stopped short of ▶



North Korea was supported by Soviet fighters, which attacked US forces in the zone known as 'MiG Alley'. This image is a propaganda photo from the official North Korean news agency.

KOREAN WAR

▶ following them across the border into South Korea. It was imperative that the offensive appeared to be an internal conflict, with the ultimate objective of reunification. Without their Soviet advisors, the North Korean forces struggled to maintain discipline, while the South Korean army failed to collapse as Kim Il-Sung's regime had predicted. In fact, at times, the South's resistance proved to be surprisingly tenacious. Ultimately, though, their efforts weren't enough to hold back the red tide: by the third day of the war, the capital, Seoul, had fallen, and in August the remnants of the South Korean army were close to collapse around the city of Pusan (now Busan), on the southern tip of the peninsula.

THE NORTH KOREANS were in for a shock of their own, however. In New York, the UN Security Council, which was being boycotted by the Soviet Union at the time, declared that North Korea was the aggressor in the conflict and voted to send military forces to support South Korea. The effort would be led by the US, but it wouldn't be alone: another 15 countries offered to supply troops, including the UK, while five others contributed field hospitals and ambulances.

In early autumn, the commander of the UN forces, US General Douglas MacArthur, decided that it was time for a counteroffensive. On 15th September, US forces landed at Inchon to the North Koreans' rear, and rapidly tore through the enemy's positions. The UN troops quickly advanced north, reclaimed Seoul



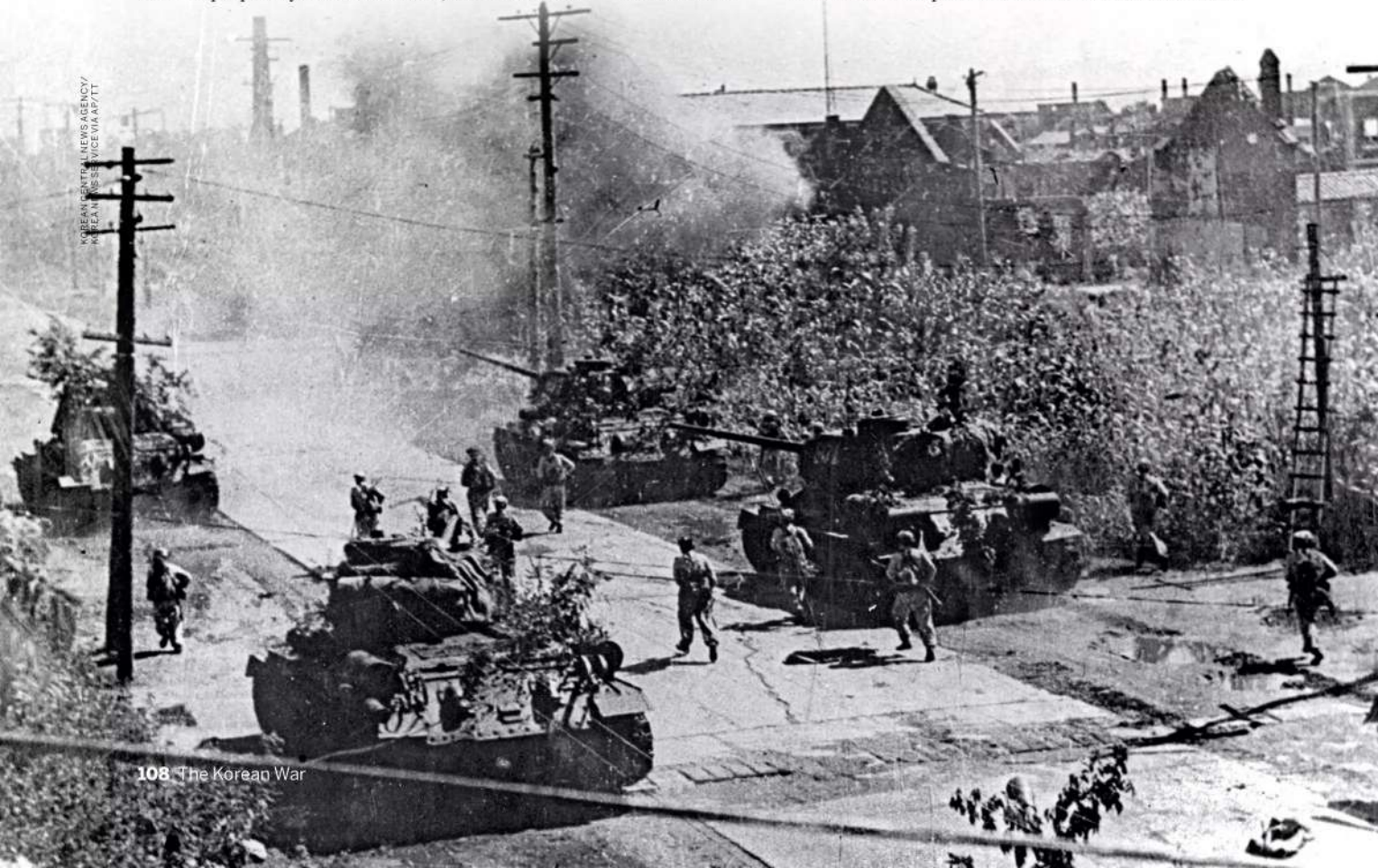
North Korean soldiers receive instruction in the field in 1953.

and continued into North Korea with the stated goal of reuniting Korea, but this time on South Korea's terms. In October, North Korea's capital Pyongyang was taken, and victory seemed within reach.

After three days, the South's capital Seoul was captured by North Korea.

HOWEVER, WHEN THE UN troops approached the Yalu River, the border between Korea and China (where Mao's communists had taken power a year earlier), Beijing decided to intervene.

By the end of October 1950, almost 400,000 Chinese 'volunteers' had poured into North Korea and were



FACTS ★ Korean War

25th June, 1950 – 27th July, 1953

Combatants

Republic of Korea
United Nations

People's Rep of Korea
China
Soviet Union

Strength

1.2 million UN alliance
forces

1.2 million North Koreans
and Chinese

Losses

800,000

1.5 million

beginning to push back the invading troops. UN forces suffered major losses, and the retreat during the winter of 1950-51 became one of the most traumatic periods of fighting in US and British military history. US assault aircraft tried to delay the Chinese, but they were unable to stop them completely. The North retook Seoul before the city was finally recaptured by UN forces.

THE FRONT LINE stabilised along the 38th parallel at the start of summer 1951, and ceasefire negotiations began in July. It took another two years before the hostilities finally ended, though. At the end of the war, 94,000 UN personnel had been killed, 55,000 of them from the US. If you count military and civilian losses, at least three million Koreans from across the peninsula lost their lives, while the number of North Korean and Chinese troops killed is usually reported at an incredible 1.5 million. ►

**“THE FRONT LINE
STABILISED ALONG
THE 38TH PARALLEL
AT THE START OF
SUMMER 1951”**

A US soldier
during the
Korean War.

North Korean
invasion
Jun-Sep 1950
UN offensive
Sep-Nov 1950
Chinese offensive



Allied aircraft took off from aircraft carriers stationed off the Korean coast. They flew mostly from the east coast, but with occasional sorties from the west. They also flew from several bases in Korea, especially Busan, Gwangju and Pyongyang while it was in UN hands. The allies also used air bases in Japan.

**HOW THE KOREAN WAR
WAS FOUGHT: ON THE
GROUND, IN THE AIR &
BY GUERRILLA FORCES**

1. TRENCH WARFARE

After a year of mobile warfare, operations in 1951 morphed into trench warfare. In many ways, the tactics used were reminiscent of those employed in World War I.

In spring 1951, the communists were still moving south, but it was largely an army of Chinese troops by this point, with the battered North Korean army playing a discordant second fiddle. Kim Il-Sung's role had been similarly downgraded and all crucial decisions concerning the war were now being taken by Chairman Mao and his Chinese Communist Party (CCP) cohorts in Beijing. Pressing home the advantage of its surprise counterattack in spring, China hoped to repeat North Korea's rapid conquest of the South in the summer and early autumn of 1950.

The writing was already on the wall, though. Even in early February, communist supply lines were worryingly long and the regime's forces were sustaining ever-greater losses. In just five days fighting around Wonju in January 1951, the North Koreans lost 11,000 men. This was primarily the



**Matthew B
Ridgway.**

**Below: the 1st
Marine Division
looks out from
its position
adjacent to the
dividing line at
Panmunjon.**

result of an allied artillery bombardment, backed up by US B-29 air strikes. The artillery and air support gave UN ground forces a huge advantage over their opponents. In the Battle of the Twin Tunnels on 1st February, US and French forces – supported by the 347th Field Artillery Battalion – attacked several Chinese regiments, killing 1,300 men.

UN FORCES SUFFERED big losses at the start of the year, too. Under pressure from six Chinese and North Korean divisions, parts of X Corps were forced to retreat and establish new positions. They held their new ground, but not without incurring heavy losses: 9,800 South Koreans, 1,900 Americans and 100 Dutch. While the allied force's death toll was high, it was nothing compared to the casualty figures of previous months, and at the same time, their opponent's losses were steadily increasing.

A major setback for the UN had come on 4th January when Chinese and North Korean troops had occupied Seoul, but on 14th March UN forces took back control of the South Korean capital.

A MONTH LATER on 10th April, President Harry S Truman sacked MacArthur and appointed General Matthew B Ridgway in his place as commander of the UN forces. Ridgway stated that the most important objective was to stand firm against the next big Chinese offensive. The allied forces were determined not to yield Seoul to the communists for a third time. The anticipated attack began on

“ON THE ALLIED SIDE, BULLDOZERS AND ENGINEERS DUG OUT TUNNELS AND BUILT BUNKERS IN THE HILLSIDES”



22nd April and reached the outskirts of Seoul, but the UN troops held on and the communists were repelled. They'd learned how to stand firm.

In Beijing, the CCP also drew its own conclusions about what had happened. The losses had been enormous, not least because of the strong coordination between the UN's ground and air forces. Messages came from the Soviets that it was time to start negotiating in earnest, but Kim Il-Sung wasn't interested in making peace and insisted that the war continue. It was the Chinese who were calling the shots in the ground war, though, not the North Koreans.

In Beijing, Mao and his comrades were ready to call a halt to the war. The Chinese People's Liberation Army – or the Chinese People's Voluntary Army, as the troops were known once they crossed into Korea to distance themselves from the regime – had demonstrated they were a match for the US forces and had succeeded in driving the UN out of North Korea. It was enough.

On 8th July, 1951, US and Chinese negotiators met at Kaesong for the first tentative efforts to end the war. It did not work out. In practice, both sides instead made decisions that ended mobile warfare in Korea and replaced it with two years of trench warfare instead.

ALONG AND TO the north of the 38th parallel, UN forces, South Koreans, Chinese and North Koreans dug down to defend their positions. Across the entire Korean peninsula, a system of trenches appeared, including in front of all the high ground at that latitude. On the allied side, bulldozers and engineers dug out tunnels and built bunkers in the hillsides. Barbed wire was deployed in front of the defensive works and laced with tripwires that activated mines or set off phosphorus grenades that would reveal Chinese night attacks.

In order to negate the UN's superior artillery and air support, the Chinese often chose to attack at night. The UN responded by sending out reconnaissance patrols. In the dark, in the one- or two-kilometre wide strips between UN and Chinese lines, a series of brutal battles took place.

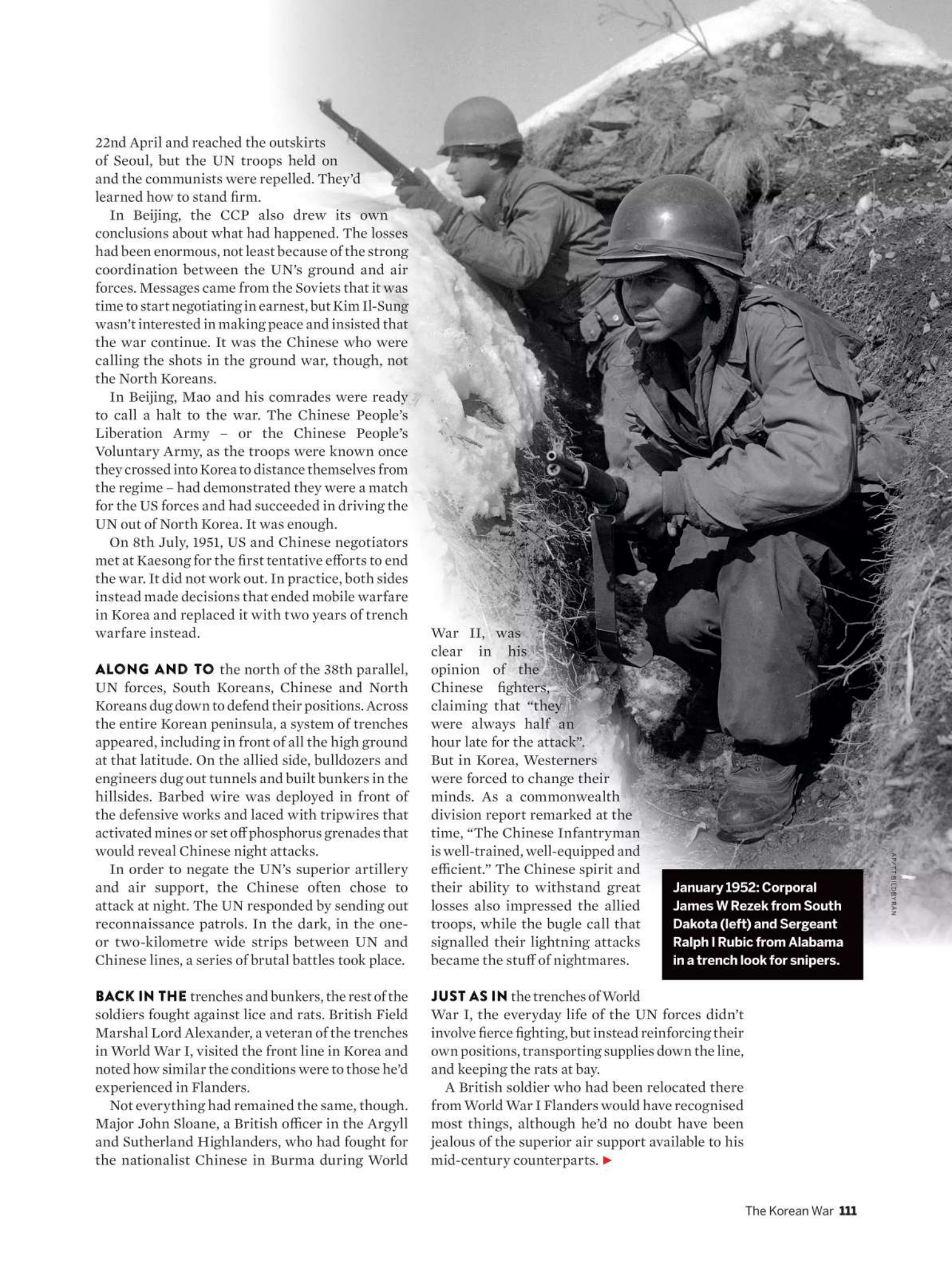
BACK IN THE trenches and bunkers, the rest of the soldiers fought against lice and rats. British Field Marshal Lord Alexander, a veteran of the trenches in World War I, visited the front line in Korea and noted how similar the conditions were to those he'd experienced in Flanders.

Not everything had remained the same, though. Major John Sloane, a British officer in the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, who had fought for the nationalist Chinese in Burma during World

War II, was clear in his opinion of the Chinese fighters, claiming that "they were always half an hour late for the attack". But in Korea, Westerners were forced to change their minds. As a commonwealth division report remarked at the time, "The Chinese Infantryman is well-trained, well-equipped and efficient." The Chinese spirit and their ability to withstand great losses also impressed the allied troops, while the bugle call that signalled their lightning attacks became the stuff of nightmares.

JUST AS IN the trenches of World War I, the everyday life of the UN forces didn't involve fierce fighting, but instead reinforcing their own positions, transporting supplies down the line, and keeping the rats at bay.

A British soldier who had been relocated there from World War I Flanders would have recognised most things, although he'd no doubt have been jealous of the superior air support available to his mid-century counterparts. ►



January 1952: Corporal James W Rezek from South Dakota (left) and Sergeant Ralph I Rubic from Alabama in a trench look for snipers.

2. AIR WARFARE

The US competed in the air with Soviet MiG fighters, battling for supremacy in the zone that soon became known as 'MiG Alley'.

The US Air Force (USAF) in Korea was led by men who had flown sorties in Japan between 1944 and 1945. This was useful because the US planned to use the same tactics again: it intended to bomb the North Koreans into submission, or at least until they stopped obeying the regime in Pyongyang.

GENERAL MACARTHUR ADVOCATED comprehensive strategic bombing against Chinese cities in Manchuria (the general's preference was for nuclear weapons), but President Truman refused to sanction any flights over Chinese territory. Despite Chinese involvement in the war, Washington didn't want to risk an open confrontation with Mao.

That left only North Korean targets for the US bombers. Unexpected problems soon appeared, though: North Korea had only five major industrial centres: Pyongyang, Wonsan, Hungnam, Chongjin and Rashin.

While these were all quickly destroyed by blanket bombing, the destruction of civilian housing was

According to US military sources, America lost five B-29 Superfortress bombers in Korea in the period up to April 1951.

A railway line south of Wonsan, on the east coast of North Korea, is attacked with napalm by a B-26 bomber.

also, for several reasons, less extensive than it had been in Japan.

IT BECAME CLEAR to senior command staff of the USAF in Korea that although they were hitting their targets, they weren't influencing the war's development. Then, on 27th October, 1950, the Chinese entered the conflict and the air force had to split its resources so that it could offer close air support to the troops on the ground while maintaining its strategic attacks on North Korea's transport infrastructure. In total, the USAF claimed to have destroyed more than 111,000 such targets in the north. Naturally it claimed that its air crews avoided collateral damage where possible, while simultaneously declaring that one of the air force's goals in the war was to undermine the morale of North Korean civilians. The contradiction was clear.

But while the US was busy playing at 'Good Cop, Bad Cop' North Korea remained stonily silent. Indeed, the information about North Korean losses, along with the damage to its strategic targets and civilian settlements is to this day based on US intelligence estimates: North Korea has never published such information.

THE ROLE OF the air force can be broken down into distinct phases. The first few months of the war were largely characterised by the destruction of vital facilities in North Korea's major cities.

The second phase, which started in autumn 1950, involved offering close support to UN ground forces which were being forced to retreat by a Chinese and North Korean counterattack.

In the third phase, carried out in autumn 1951, the US started bombing bridges and railways, while the fourth phase, at the beginning of 1952, saw US aircraft targeting North Korea's means of producing electricity.

Sadly, the air war was being fought against two regimes that didn't really care about the suffering of their civilians. And while North Korea's industry may have been broken, the country coped because most of its supplies came from China and the



US ARMY MILITARY HISTORY INSTITUTE

Soviet Union, territories that were out of bounds for US aircraft.

Carrier aircraft provided by the US, Great Britain and Australia could fly up to four sorties a day against targets in North Korea, while US B-29 strategic bombers took off from bases in Japan, primarily Okinawa. They didn't have the airspace above the peninsula to themselves for long, though. In November 1950, the first Soviet MiG-15 fighter landed in North Korea, and it wasn't long before the jets, guided by ground radar systems, began to pick off US and allied bombers.

As allied aircraft passed across the 38th parallel, they entered a zone that US pilots nicknamed 'MiG Alley', where the Soviet fighters awaited them.

While the UN planes were based in Japan or on aircraft carriers in the waters around Korea, the Soviet fighters flew out of Shenyang (formerly Mukden) in China. While never openly admitting their role in the war, the Soviets devoted significant resources to the conflict: an estimated 72,000 Soviet air force personnel are believed to have served in China or North Korea at some point during the war.

THE HEAVIEST US Air Force losses occurred at the Battle of Namsi, which took place on 24th October, 1951. It was the fiercest dogfight of the Korean War and was also the first time that jets fought on both sides. The battle began when no less than 150 MiG jets attacked a US bombing formation along with its fighter escort. The formation's high-cover support consisted of 34 modern F-86 Sabre fighters while 55 older F-84 Thunderjets provided close cover. The MiGs broke through the high cover and attacked the F-84s and the B-29 bombers. Although outnumbered, the F-86 Sabres managed to engage the MiG-15s, but the straight-winged Thunderjets were outclassed by the more agile Soviets, which took full advantage of the MiG-15's more advanced swept-wing design.

The US lost three B-29s and one F-84 in the Namsi dogfight. Four other bombers sustained damage. The battle demonstrated the vulnerabilities of the B-29 bombers in the age of jet engines and from that point on their role was limited to night-time bombing raids.

The air war in Korea was fought with modern jets on both sides, but while the US had the numerical

advantage, its strategic bombing tactics did not yield the desired result: it was almost impossible to knock out an agrarian economy with aerial bombardments while a suffering population would only have been a problem for rulers that courted popular opinion. Supplies from China further complicated the task, as the factories were across the border and out of reach of US aircraft. ►

“THE HEAVIEST US AIR FORCE LOSSES OCCURRED AT THE BATTLE OF NAMSI, WHICH TOOK PLACE ON 24TH OCTOBER, 1951.”

The F-86 Sabre fighter was successfully used against Soviet MiG-15s during the Korean War.

BETTMANN/CONTRAST/ALAMY

Armed South Korean police watch over the bodies of two guerrilla soldiers killed in the mountains. The corpses were dragged down to a guard post in the lowlands to be identified.



3. SPECIAL FORCES & GUERRILLAS

UN forces tried to use North Korean refugees to infiltrate the enemy, but they themselves were infiltrated instead. Neither side enjoyed any notable success with guerrilla warfare.

General MacArthur had a well-known distrust for any type of special operations behind enemy lines, especially those performed by non-US forces. It was no surprise, therefore, when he quickly and brutally put a stop to an operation planned by the SAS in Korea.

As early as 1949, the South Korean army sent small groups of partisans into North Korea, but there were only a limited number of volunteers after the outbreak of war. However, when the North Koreans and Chinese advanced south from the Yalu River at the end of 1950, between 6,000 and 10,000 North Koreans fled their country. The refugees travelled to the islands off the west coast of their homeland where some were armed by UN forces. The newly equipped refugees were dubbed the United Nations Partisan Infantry Korea (UNPIK), and initially settled back on the North Korean mainland to gather intelligence and carry out acts of sabotage. However, North Korea was filled with regular North Korean and Chinese military forces as well as various police and militia units, so most of the infiltrators were soon neutralised.

SOME UNPIK AGENTS decided to fight for the north even before insertion. One spectacular example of this was an agent who, having just jumped from a US transport plane in a planned parachute drop over North Korea, threw a live hand grenade back into the plane he'd just exited. Several crew members were blown out of the plane following the explosion. The pilot, Captain Berger, managed to keep the plane airborne long enough to allow the rest of the crew to bail out. He was killed at the controls when the plane crashed. Those that made it safely to the ground were taken captive and became prisoners of war.

North Korea had more experience in guerrilla warfare and had established some units in the South in 1948. The North's rapid advance south at the beginning of the war made guerrilla action unnecessary and it was only after the UN troops pushed them back north



of the 38th parallel, that the North sanctioned the guerrilla forces to begin their operations.

In 1951, the expansion of guerrilla units in the mountains of South Korea intensified, and their activities soon began to tie up UN forces. Two US Army divisions failed to destroy the guerrillas, but their efforts were eventually stopped by Operation Rat Killer, which started in December 1951. This brutal yet effective action aimed to eradicate all North Korean guerrilla forces inside UN-held territory. The operation was performed by two South Korean Divisions and resulted in 9,789 dead guerrillas, with a further 9,383 taken prisoner.

UNLIKE THE VIETCONG guerrilla units that would cause the US forces so much trouble in the following decade, the North Korean forces lacked many of the prerequisites for a successful guerrilla campaign. First and foremost, they failed to gain popular support, and they also had to contend with open terrain when they ventured out from their mountain hideouts. Military support from the North Korea army was impossible due to their location behind enemy lines, and finally, they were up against an enemy that knew the area and was determined to hunt them down and eradicate them. In fact, given their situation, it was remarkable that they remained an effective force for so long. 🇰🇷

Lars Ericson Wolke is an author and professor of military history.

Three guerrilla soldiers, one with hand grenades around his neck, pose for the camera.

Further reading:
The Korean War (1987) by Max Hastings ★
The Korean War – No Victors, No Vanquished (1999) by Stanley Sandler

AERIAL SALVO MISSES TARGET



US B-29 bombers release their deadly cargo over a North Korean supply centre. This type of aircraft flew 20,000 missions during the war.

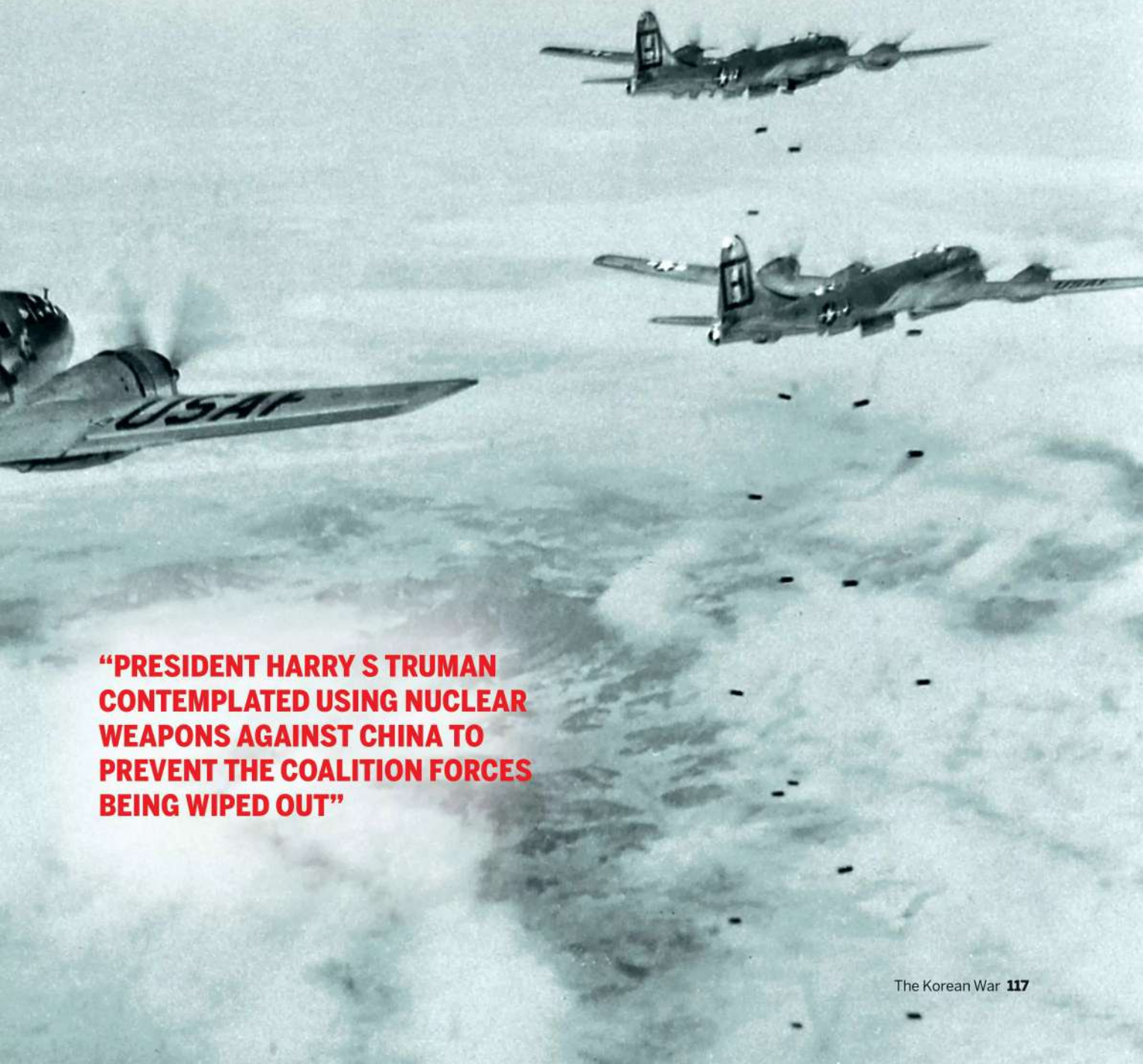
EVERETT/IBL

At the start of the war, the allies believed they would be able to break the North by flattening five key cities, but while the relentless bombing caused plenty of devastation, it failed to achieve its objective.

Text: **LARS ERICSON WOLKE**

The Korean War broke out less than five years after the end of World War II in Asia. The blanket bombing of Japan's cities in 1944 and 1945 was still fresh in the minds of US military leaders who believed that the campaign had been a major factor in Emperor Hirohito's decision

to surrender. For the US, there was no reason to assume that the same tactics wouldn't work in Korea, and General Douglas MacArthur soon advocated escalating the war further by bombing Chinese bases and cities in Manchuria to prevent Chairman Mao coming to the aid of his communist neighbour. ►



**“PRESIDENT HARRY S TRUMAN
CONTEMPLATED USING NUCLEAR
WEAPONS AGAINST CHINA TO
PREVENT THE COALITION FORCES
BEING WIPED OUT”**

AERIAL BOMBARDMENT



US pilots are briefed before a mission to bomb Sinuiju in North Korea. The city suffered heavily from aerial bombardment during the war.

- ▶ China reacted to the threat of US strikes and quickly deployed air defences to protect its major cities, including Shanghai and Beijing.

In December 1950, when the Chinese attacked and forced the UN contingent to retreat in disarray, President Harry S Truman contemplated using nuclear weapons against China to prevent the coalition forces being wiped out. The president also ordered an increase in the production of nuclear warheads, so that US stocks increased from 292 nuclear weapons in the summer of 1950 to over 1,000 just three years later.

The crisis passed, however, and spurred on by British criticism, the US put more efforts into finding a negotiated solution. The hawkish MacArthur was dismissed in April 1951, but not before North Korea had felt the full force of a modern, albeit non-nuclear, bombing campaign.



Major General Emmett O'Donnell believed it was necessary to flatten five major North Korean cities.

ON 31ST JULY, 1950, the US Strategic Air Command and US Air Force in the Far East initiated a systematic, strategic bombing campaign against North Korea. The idea was to use B-29 bombers not only to weaken the North's military power, but also to force North Korea as a whole to collapse under the weight of the massive bombing.

Major General Emmett O'Donnell believed that if the UN forces could flatten five major North Korean cities and destroy 18 other strategic targets it would have a psychological impact on the population, which would in turn act as a catalyst to destroy the nation's morale and resistance. Destroying urban centres and industrial plants should "erode the morale of the North Korean people and undermine their obedience to the communist government". It was the classic military excuse for bombing civilian targets.

There was just one problem with this approach: the US bombers didn't have enough targets. North



The stars indicate the locations of the five main target cities. The dotted line marks today's border.

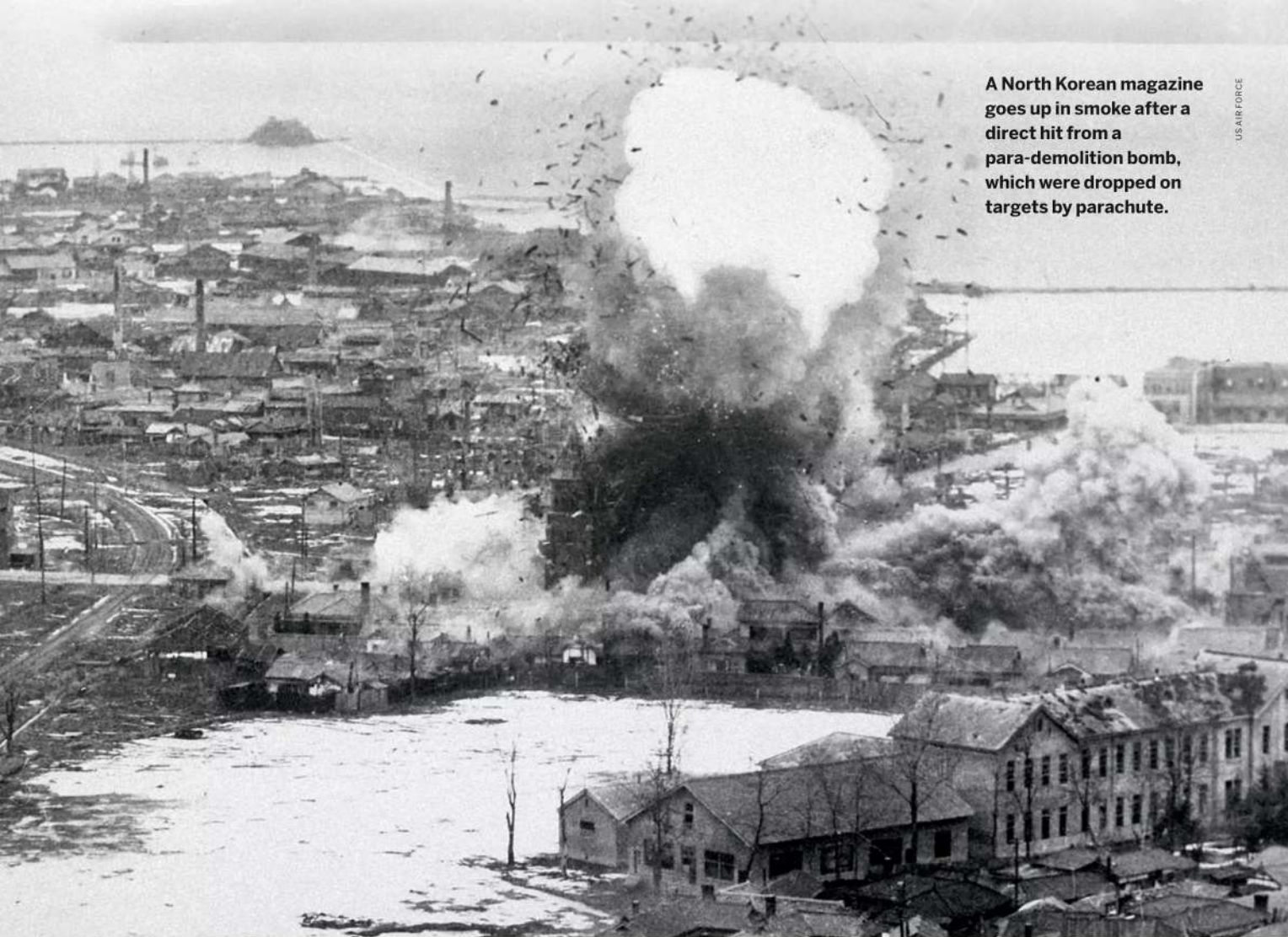
Korea only had five major industrial centres: Pyongyang, Wonsan, Hungnam, Chongjin and Rashin. Even worse from the US point of view, despite the use of incendiary devices, the type of destruction inflicted on these cities wasn't as complete as that which had been achieved when firebombing Japanese cities in 1944 and 1945.

For various technical reasons, firestorms didn't become as widespread as those that engulfed and destroyed large parts of Tokyo in March 1945. As a result, the selected North Korean conurbations weren't annihilated in the way that the US intended. There are no official North Korean figures for the number of victims of the bombing campaign, nor for the amount of damage inflicted on infrastructure and housing; instead, such information is based on estimates from US reconnaissance flights and other intelligence sources.

REGARDLESS OF WHO was doing the counting, it was clear by 27th October, 1950 that the US Air Force had run out of targets, and yet it had also failed to influence the development of the war. On the contrary, with China entering the war and successfully pushing back UN forces, US aircraft had to take on a more defensive role by providing close air support for the coalition's ground troops. They also attempted to slow the North's advance by destroying North Korean bridges, railways and other lines of communication.

By the end of the war, the US claimed to have destroyed just over 11,000 such targets in the north, including five North Korean power stations. This led to a power outage that lasted over two weeks and even affected power supplies in Manchuria in China.

Despite constant assertions by the UN that civilians were not being targeted, the stated aim



A North Korean magazine goes up in smoke after a direct hit from a para-demolition bomb, which were dropped on targets by parachute.

US AIR FORCE

of the bombing campaign remained the same: to undermine the population's morale in North Korea. The contradiction between these two positions was most clearly demonstrated, perhaps, in Operation Pressure Pump, which was conducted between 11th July and 29th August, 1952, when thousands of tonnes of napalm were dropped over 30 'military targets' inside the North Korean capital, Pyongyang.

WHILE BATTLES RAGED along the 38th parallel, the USAF stepped up its action to destroy all lines of communication in North Korea, along with any buildings and other installations in the country that could be of military value. This was interpreted to include levelling swathes of civilian housing, even within smaller cities, so that they could not be used to house North Korean or Chinese soldiers or vehicles.

In May 1953, ceasefire negotiations had stalled and the decision was taken for US bombers to breach the dams of those North Korean reservoirs used to irrigate the rice fields. Five of the 20 dams targeted, primarily located at Toksan, Kuwonga, Kusong and Toksang, were destroyed. The reservoirs emptied, meaning there was no water stores to irrigate crops later in

“THERE WAS JUST ONE PROBLEM WITH THIS APPROACH: THE US BOMBERS DIDN'T HAVE ENOUGH TARGETS”

the season, while the escaping flood waters washed away the newly sown rice plants. As a result, the country's food supply was affected with hunger the result among the civilian population, while supplies to the troops on the front line were also threatened.

US military leaders believed the bombing would cause their enemy's morale to crumble, leading to an increased willingness to compromise in the ceasefire talks, but subsequent analysis has suggested that it was threat of nuclear attacks that eventually forced China and North Korea to negotiate in earnest.

AS BRITISH JOURNALIST and author Max Hastings noted, the problem with the US approach was that it relied on a government that cared about popular opinion. Unfortunately, the regimes in Beijing and Pyongyang were probably top of the ►

AERIAL BOMBARDMENT

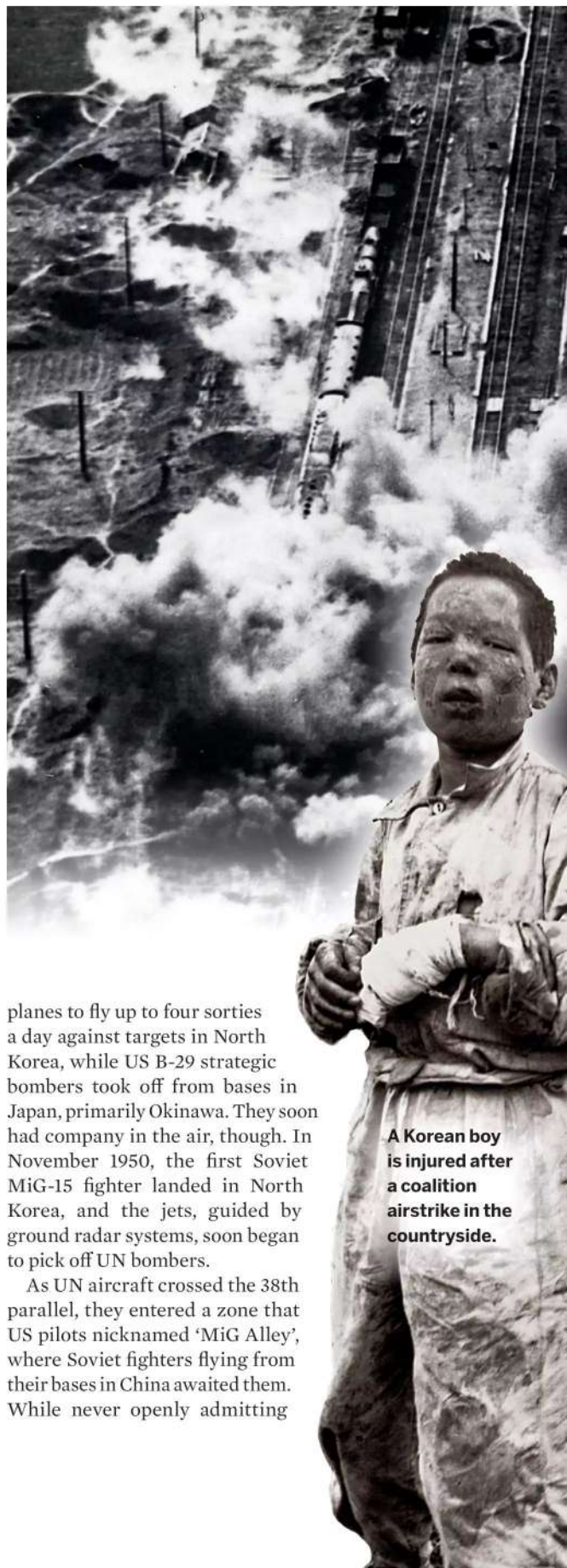


This photo was taken from a Douglas A-1 Skyraider plane from 75th US Fighter Squadron in 1952. The plane on the right has just released three bombs.

► world leaderboard when it came to indifference to their people's suffering. At the same time, the North Korean troops received most of their support from China and the Soviet Union, so bombing North Korea's industry had little effect on the nation's ability to wage war. These two factors are crucial to understanding the limitations of air warfare in general and in the Korean War in particular. The distance between the promise and the reality of the US Air Force's capability to deliver led to major disappointments on the ground. An officer in the American Eighth Army wrote in 1953:

The Eighth Army soldier cannot but accept the destruction of that 'doctrine' [that victory can be won by air power] through demonstrations, costly to him, staged by his enemies, the armies of Red North Korea and Communist China. For their troops and supplies moved, despite the harassment of our air, consistently and in quantities sufficient to meet their needs... Notwithstanding the all-out efforts of the Air Force in Korea, there was never a day when the trains did not run and the trucks did not roll behind enemy lines in North Korea... The Air Force in Korea did not fail to apply all the power of which it was capable. But it is plain that it could not, or at least did not, accomplish the mission Air Force theorists had repeatedly told the Army and the American people was sure to be accomplished under conditions of such overwhelmingly one-sided aerial strength.

AIRCRAFT CARRIERS PROVIDED by the US, Great Britain and Australia made it possible for



A Korean boy is injured after a coalition airstrike in the countryside.

planes to fly up to four sorties a day against targets in North Korea, while US B-29 strategic bombers took off from bases in Japan, primarily Okinawa. They soon had company in the air, though. In November 1950, the first Soviet MiG-15 fighter landed in North Korea, and the jets, guided by ground radar systems, soon began to pick off UN bombers.

As UN aircraft crossed the 38th parallel, they entered a zone that US pilots nicknamed 'MiG Alley', where Soviet fighters flying from their bases in China awaited them. While never openly admitting



A US B-26 Invader bombs a railway station in North Korea. Hundreds of tonnes of munitions were destroyed before they could reach the front.

HULTON-DEUTSCH COLLECTION/CORBIS/CORBIS/GETTY



Soviet MiGs were more numerous and advanced than the allied jets. They operated just north of the 38 parallel in an area nicknamed 'MiG Alley'.

“IN NOVEMBER 1950, THE FIRST MIG-15 FIGHTER[S] SOON BEGAN TO PICK OFF UN BOMBERS”

to engage the MiG-15s, but the Thunderjets were outclassed by the more agile Soviets.

The US lost three B-29s and one F-84 in the Battle of Namsi. Four other bombers took damage. The battle showed how outdated the B-29 bombers were in the age of jet engines and their role was limited to night-time bombing raids from that point on.

ALTHOUGH MORE US bombers were lost once the MiGs entered the fray, the losses never came close to those suffered during the war against Germany a few years earlier. One clear indicator that the survival rate was greater in Korea was that a bomber pilot had to perform 35 combat missions before his tour ended and he could go home. In Europe, between 1942 and 1945, pilots were expected to fly perhaps 25 missions, but they would be considered extremely lucky if they survived their tour.

Sadly, while survival rates were higher, the crucial lessons learned in Korea – that it was almost impossible to knock out an agrarian economy with aerial bombardments and that a suffering population was only a problem for rulers that courted popular opinion – were buried on the Peninsula and the US was doomed to repeat the class it flunked when war broke out in Vietnam a decade later. ❏

Lars Ericson Wolke is a military historian.

their role in the war, the Soviets devoted significant resources to the conflict: an estimated 72,000 Soviet air force personnel are believed to have served in China, principally at Shenyang (formerly Mukden), or North Korea at some point during the war.

THE HEAVIEST USAF losses occurred at the Battle of Namsi, which took place on 24th October, 1951. It was the fiercest air battle of the Korean War, and was also the first time that jets fought on both sides. The battle started with no less than 150 MiG jets attacking a US bombing formation and its fighter escort. The formation's high-cover support consisted of 34 modern F-86 Sabre fighters while 55 F-84 Thunderjets provided the close cover. The MiGs pierced the high cover and attacked the F-84s and the B-29 bombers. Although outnumbered, the F-86 Sabres managed

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THE KOREAN WAR



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The counteroffensive sends the North Koreans running and it seems like the war is over – until China's massed ranks decide to join the battle.

